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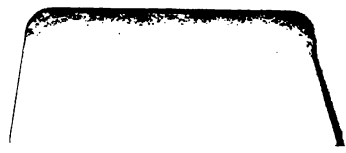
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ZOH RAB

THE HOSTAGE.

BY THE
AUTHOR OF "HAJJI BABA."

Hatred after hatred has been manifested by thee, O Tyrant Chief!
and thy secret rancour has been revealed.

THE POEM OF AMBU, IN THE MOLLAKAT.

James M. McKim
IN TWO VOLUMES.

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MICROFILMED
AT HARVARD

Z O H R A B.

CHAPTER I.

Lost love is like the mare's milk which the Arab maiden spilt in the sand. She may cry over it ; but she will never get it into the skin again.

LOVES IN THE DESERT.

THE surprise of the chief huntsman's widow upon seeing Zohrab return by the terrace instead of the door of his dwelling, almost made her look upon him as a supernatural being, and without asking him a single question, she took her departure with true discretion and without delay, determining to seek her son, who was waiting at the gate of the harem to reconduct his master home.

Zohrab had entirely forgotten the danger to which he had been exposed in the enchantment of possessing the love of Amima. He dwelt upon every circumstance of his interview with the solicitude of an enraptured lover. He was as avaricious of every word which she had addressed him, as a miser might be who can never sufficiently count over and feast upon the gold which he has unexpectedly found. What visions of future bliss, what raptures of enjoyment did he not promise to himself, as he allowed his imagination a free range over the bewitching pictures presented to him by hope. His youthful mind, too little practiced in the ways of life, and particularly in the schemes of Persian intrigue, could look upon the future friendship of his father and the Shah as certain, and could almost point out the very moment when, as a necessary link to the union of the two states, the niece of the Shah would be united to the son of the powerful chief of Asterabad.

He was in the midst of these visions, when he heard the door of his apartment opened, and to his dismay perceived the well-remembered figure of his mysterious female

visiter approach him. This time she did not long preserve her incognito, but at once taking off her veil, disclosed to the eyes of Zohrab the animated and impassioned countenance, the beautiful and seductive form of the ardent Zulma. To retreat was impossible, to turn her away with violence was contrary to the manliness of his nature; but to conceal his disgust, particularly immediately after the rapturous moments of a true passion which he had enjoyed, was impossible. He received her in the coldest manner, and although she seated herself without hesitation, he insisted upon standing before her, thereby intimating his determination to keep himself upon no terms of equality, giving to her that precedence and authority due to his jailer.

"Whence come ye?" said she, with great agitation. "As ye would not die, tell me, have you not been absent?"

"Am I to render an account of myself to whomsoever chooses to question me," said Zohrab. "If you are my jailer, it is enough that you find me true to my prison."

"What was floating in the air, not a few minutes since," said Zulma, "between yon turret and your terrace? Have you not been visited by some one? My eyes cannot have deceived me."

"There may or there may not be visions floating in the air," said the cautious lover, "it is not for me to affirm or deny the fact; but all that you can wish to ascertain is that I am your prisoner, and here I am. What more can you desire?"

"My prisoner? Zohrab," said she, with a softened tone, "how can you be my prisoner? Am I not thine? Are we not affianced man and wife? Am I not thy humblest slave?"

"The Shah has shown a great deal of condescension towards me," said Zohrab, in an embarrassed manner, "and has wished to bestow upon me the hand of the most celebrated woman in his court, but such a reward is totally unmerited by me, and I am altogether unworthy of such a benefit."

"What words are these?" said Zulma; there is no turning back from what has been decreed. A man like *Zohrab Khan* is not to retreat from his word."

"What word!" said our hero, with scorn on his lip. "What word have I ever given that I have not kept?"

"You are my affianced husband," said Zulma, the colour rising quick into her face. "You have therefore given me your word; and can you retract it?"

"Hear me, lady," said Zohrab, with great composure, at the same time distance of manner. "I never gave my word that I would be your husband. It has been the business of those whose interest it was that it should be so, to spread such a report, but I have never been a party concerned, and let me now no longer allow you to be deceived. I never can be your husband—and more—I never will be your husband."

The sudden appearance of brilliant flame in a dark night on the summit of a volcano—the angry foam boiling on the surface of the sea by a squall, are but poor images by which to compare the wrath which at once mantled into the countenance of Zulma, when she heard these words. Love kept her violence in check, but suspicious jealousy impelled it on—she would have stabbed at the same time that she would have pressed him to her heart. Words could scarcely find utterance through her choaking throat, but when they did, they came forth with the rapidity of a torrent.

"And is it thus? And have I fallen so low? Am I to be rejected, to be spurned at, by one whose life I have saved at the expense of my own honour? Where am I?—do I dream?—Is it not said or sung in every corner of the street, that Zulma and Zohrab are man and wife? and am I now to be told that I am a liar? that it is not so? What words are these! What fire is in my brain! What ashes have fallen on my head! I! I, who am that Zulma who make the men of Tehran kiss the dust of my slippers; whose very name causes the heart to quake, and whose eye inflames hearts—am I to be rejected? Heaven forbid! Be Allah my witness, this grief I will not devour alone—shame shall not fall upon me alone! Zohrab, thou who callest thyself a man, can'st thou see this and not reprove at thy hated words? Not my husband? In the name of Allah, and why not? What have I done? Have I not loved thee as woman never loved?—have I not called upon thee night and morning?—have I not sat on yonder tex-

race to catch a glimpse of thee, until the sun scorched my temples, and until the dews of the night ate into the marrow of my bones? And am I to be told, that I am nothing to thee? O Allah, great and good! O holy prophet! help to thy poor slave! What have I done that this heavy misery should await me! I rejected? I! am I—Zulma, or am I some wretch worthy of hate? Wherefore behave thus to me—let me entreat thee”—here the impassioned maiden raised her eyes and her hands towards the embarrassed youth, and would have clasped his knees; but he stepped forwards to prevent her, and affected by this act of humility, he said as many soothing and consolatory things as the exigency of the moment required, but still kept himself from uttering one word which might give a hope of relenting.

During the whole of this scene, Zohrab's patience and good nature were put to a severe trial, and often, had it been in his power during its course would he have fled, rather than have submitted himself to it. Disgust at Zulma's conduct, at this exhibition of violent and unrestrained passion, excited his principal feeling, nor did one single word which she uttered, or one look which she cast upon him, produce the smallest effect in the manner which she hoped. All her animation was met by coldness, to her impassioned words he scarcely gave an answer, and from the fire of her eye he turned away with indifference. He had hoped that having exhausted herself in the above described rhapsody she would have left him; but no, he was destined still to witness another explosion. All her tenderness now turned to anger.

“I hate you! I abhor your very sight! leave me! odious monster! go—keep your hated looks to yourself: but I will not live unrevenged. I am not to be despised—insulting and pitiful wretch!—Zulma is somebody here—she has a power which will bring you to the dust of her feet; there you shall grovel and entreat, but she shall—will despise you.”

She continued to rant in this manner until she had wound herself up to phrenzy, the cool indifference of Zohrab increasing her violence to a pitch which would have expended itself in some act of assault, had she had means or weapons at hand. At length, as if of a sudden she

had been struck by some impelling thought, she threw on her veil, and rushed out of the room with a quick step through the passages of the house, and soon she found herself hurrying forward through the streets she scarcely knew whither. Again she stopped; and then, more collected, she determined as a last resource to seek the dwelling of the dervish, whose name and doings were now the theme of the whole city, and submit her case to his opinion.

Having passed with a rapid step through the various streets of the city which led to his dwelling, at length she reached its humble entrance, and at once made her way to his presence. She found him preparing a still greater quantity of rope than he usually wore round his girdle, and twisting it in various odd knots, with a peculiarly wild and mysterious air. His whole appearance inspired the maiden with awe; and at once she found herself deprived of those feelings, almost amounting to madness, which had impelled her to seek him.

He scarcely took his eyes from his work, when she came in, whilst she stood half advancing, half retreating, at the threshold of his den.

At length, with a scowling glance darting from beneath his over-hanging brow, he said, "Who is that daughter of violence that thus unasked-for entereth a dervish's dwelling? His ways are peaceful. He abhors the wicked."

"As you are a man of God, O dervish!" said Zulma, with a supplicating accent, "have pity upon a poor wretch, who in this world has nought to support her misery except it may be in your advice."

"Speak," said he, "what would ye? Our ears are open to the afflicted—but woe to the wicked!"

"What can I say?" said Zulma; "I want your assistance to restore to me that which I have lost. I have been deprived of my only happiness."

"Before we converse," said the dervish, "tell me one thing. Are you one of those who see things as they are, or do you see them through one small crack in your understanding, which makes them look all awry, which makes small things look large, and large little—which makes you call happiness what is in truth misery—and

which, without considering the feelings of others, makes you look to your own gratification, and your own whims, as the only one unvarying object?"

"*Wahi! Wahi!*" exclaimed the maiden in piteous accent, "I am a woman, and nothing but a woman. I love with a woman's love, and hate with a woman's hate. When I want a thing I want it violently, immediately, without delay. What I want now must be instant—you must help me—I can take no refusal."

"Speak then," said the dervish, looking at her with a slow and scrutinizing glance, "if I can be of use, upon my eyes be it! but beware that you expect too much from me."

"Although you are a dervish, yet still you are a man, and must have man's feelings. You must know too what a woman's feelings are—when all at once she is bereft of what she most desires. I will not detain you by a long story; the long and short is, I have loved; and to my full conviction was beloved in return. I still love, but am not loved in return. I want to bring back that love, and 'tis from you I require a spell to produce that effect—do not say nay—quick, quick—give me the aid of your utmost wisdom, and you will not find Zulma ungrateful. Here," said she, tearing off a magnificent armlet, and almost strangling herself to undo her necklace, "here is only an earnest of what she will give."

"Keep your ornaments, woman!" said the unmoved dervish; "we seek poverty as our greatest happiness. Possessions corrupt the heart, and are inconvenient to the body. If thou canst add a *ghex* to this rope, then indeed thou wilt confer a favour, but as for thy gold and thy trinkets, throw them to thy pitiful, light balanced sex."

"But say, as you love the Prophet! as you hope for a seat in the seventh heaven! say that you will assist me," said she, "come now, wait not, now, follow me!"

"Hold!" said the dervish. "Are you mad? Think ye that a man's mind will change as easily as thine? Will the wind change a minute the sooner because thou pointest to where thou wishest it to blow from? I have my spells, and can ordain a charm; but there are times and places for all things." Then throwing the greatest possible seriousness into his features, and approaching close to

the impatient maiden, he said, "Canst thou encounter black midnight, and not fear? When the jackal is afoot, when the dog at his carcase howls, and when the murderer speeds his blow, canst thou meet me—me, the dervish, with this single rope for his defence, and, like a thief lurking for plunder, steal me unknown into the chamber of your faithless man. If though canst not, speak no more and go."

The awe-struck maiden trembled with fear at these words, but recollecting herself at length, she said, "Yes, oh, yes, I can! I can do all that, and more. You shall enter his door; I will watch; and, if it were necessary, I will lay down my life in the attempt. I must have his love, or I die."

"Well then," said the dervish, "'tis to thee I leave the performance of this. When I am thus brought face to face with him, leave the rest to me. Thy courage and fidelity will have their reward. At midnight we meet here; not a minute sooner, not a minute later—begone." Upon which he again turned himself to knotting his rope, and mumbling low-spoken words to himself.

Zulma, slowly retreating from his cell, turned the words of the dervish in her mind, and became perplexed at their strange and mysterious import. "What can he mean?" said she; "can he be full of wicked intent, murder perhaps; and does he wish to make me an accomplice in his guilt? Will he strangle my Zohrab? Woe is me, what can this mean?" Still she recollected the extraordinary reputation which he had acquired; the astonishing results which had proceeded from his interference; and that, happen what might, she would always be in her father's house, where she could be within call of help at a moment's notice. Having at length reached her own chamber, she reflected that it would be wise to have recourse to the humpback in this emergency, whose advice she had always found highly beneficial, and who would not fail to help her with his counsel. Accordingly she sent for him, and though the hour had already passed when people usually retired to rest, still she found no difficulty in bringing him instantly to her call.

"What has happened, O my Khanum?" said he, as soon as he appeared. "The fowls of the air have roosted,

prayers have long since been made, we also were going to rest, but you alone are on the watch."

"Hear me!" said Zulma, "there must be no rest for either of us to-night. I must tell you all that has happened to me this evening. I was seated on the terrace looking towards the apartment of the hostage; there was no stir in it whatever; it appeared to me as if he were absent. You know, one can but partially see the tower from where I was seated, and therefore it is impossible for me to speak with certainty as to what I saw, but strange to say, I think in the dark I could discern something floating in the air, and descending with rapidity as if from the tower. Conceive my astonishment,—and, shall I acknowledge it? my impatience, my rage, my jealousy. I immediately went to him, and, to my confusion, there I found him totally unmoved, as if nothing had happened, professing ignorance of what I myself had seen with my own eyes, and rebutting all my suspicions with derision. Shall I also tell you that I also found his soul turned upside down against me. He himself told me that he would not marry me. He rejected me with scorn. He treated me like the dirt on his slippers, and would have shaken me off with the same facility that he would them; but you know me; what more can I say?"

The humpback, who did know her, and well, finding that she was beginning to lose her reason, and to rave, gradually stopped the incipient passion, and led her to relate all she had done in securing the dervish's interference. When she related the manner and the hour in which he was to be introduced to the hostage, the barber lent his whole attention, and his suspicious mind thought he could discover some latent plot. He therefore agreed with Zulma that it would be unwise to leave him entirely unobserved, and it was determined between them that he, the humpback, after Zulma had led the dervish to the door of Zohrab's apartment, should place himself in such a position as to observe what might take place.

Upon this they parted, and midnight being at hand, the impatient maiden, wrapping herself in the ample folds of her darkest veil, took her way to the dervish's cell. Ere she reached it, her ears were struck by sounds which indicated any thing but secrecy or precaution. She found

him seated on his leopard skin, on an open spot near his habitation, shouting out ever and anon, in loud though melancholy tones, the sacred *Hou, hou!* varied by *Allah, ho Akbar!* *Allah ho Allah, hou!* and intermixed by an occasional blast of his dolorous sounding horn, which awoke all the sympathies of every neighbouring dog, who, howling their sad and ominous responses, excited those of more distant dogs, by which there might be heard in every part of the still city one long and continual concert of howlings and moanings.

As soon as he perceived Zulma's approach, he arose, threw his leopard's skin over his shoulder, and without saying a word, strided forwards towards the house of the chief executioner, followed by his companion. There was a dim ray of a waning moon which shone upon them as they passed along the silent and desolated streets, sufficiently strong to light up his wild and singularly arrayed person. He had swelled the circumference of his girdle to an immense size by a large addition to the folds of his mysterious rope; over this floated his leopard's skin, whilst his heavy spear rested on his shoulder. When they approached the gate of the Ark he stopped short, and coming close to the maiden, said to her—"Upon your head be it if I am stopped—say we come on a business of life and death." As they approached the guard stationed at the wicket, Zulma, whose person and character were well known to every body, received a ready admittance, as she had before been allowed an exit, and when it was seen by whom she was accompanied, still less was any doubt created that all was right. They passed on freely, and without let or hindrance entered her father's house, when instead of taking her path to her own part of the house, she stepped a little out of her way to show the derisive entrance to Zohrab's apartment. Having ascertained that, he again stopped, and in a low though most serious toned whisper, said—"Well, thou hast done thy part; but mark me!—if I am interrupted in the least, either directly or indirectly, by noise, peepings, or any other symptom of impertinent curiosity, until the very first rays of the sun break forth and strike the turrets of the Ark, the charm is broken—it becomes of no effect, and Allah best knows the consequences which may ensue! for I do not." These words sunk deep into the maiden's

heart, for she had just planned in her mind where she could best place herself to watch the progress of the spell which he was about to perform. Now, however, she shrunk into herself, and would have willingly given one of her eyes to prevent the humpback from prying; but it was too late—it would be impossible to find him. She therefore in silence retreated to her own room, there to await the dawn, and the result of that upon which were to depend her future happiness or misery.

CHAPTER II.

“Although a rope may be my death, yet 'tis life to me now.”

ROBBER'S SOLILOQUY.

ZOHRAH was in a profound sleep;—the image of his lovely Amima was occasionally passing in secret visions through his mind. Every delight which the waywardness of a dream could invent was playing through the mazes of his scarcely animate brain, when of a sudden the words “Zohrab! Zohrab!” uttered in a low but most distinct manner, struck his ear. At first they seemed to him to be part of his dream, and as the voice which uttered them, kind and soothing, was familiar to him, he blessed the vision as it spoke, for it reminded him of the voice of his father. Again the sounds struck his ear—louder and still louder. He now, half awake, raised his head from his pillow, and lent a sort of incredulous ear, as if to ascertain that all was still. “Zohrab! Zohrab!” again was said, but in a manner that could not be mistaken. The perplexed, half alarmed, half enraptured youth, answered almost involuntarily—“Oh! my father!—here am I.”

“Zohrab,” said the voice, “Arise—let us be gone—thy exile is over—Asterabad is already before us.”

“Oh, Allah!” answered the youth, now entirely self-possessed, “who and what are you.”

“I am thy father,” said the voice; “follow—there is death in delay.”

"But where, where are you? let me embrace your knees; let thy son claim a father's blessing." The door of his apartment, as well as the window, letting in a ray of the moon, whose light was just vanishing, sufficiently lighted up the figure of him who was addressing him, and there, in the person of the Dervish Hezzarpicheh, he indeed saw his father. Dressed and metamorphosed as he was, it was impossible even for a son to have discovered his parent; but the voice, thrilling through every nerve, and giving fresh life and vigour to his whole being, could not be mistaken. He quickly arose, and threw himself rapturously upon his father's bosom, who, though steadily pursuing his long-planned and hitherto successful scheme could not repress his paternal feelings, and that one moment of a father's tenderness obliterated the thousand anxieties of many long and tedious months.

"Ask nothing now," said Zaul Khan; "be active, and let us be gone."

In an instant Zohrab put on his *caba*, girded on his sword, and thrust his *khanjar* or poignard into his girdle; but during the time of his hasty toilet something hard fell to the ground, which at that moment he heeded not. This short delay had, however, turned his mind to the one, the all-engrossing thought of his mind,—and Amima's image, in all her loveliness, stood before his bright imagination. He stopt and hesitated.

"Zohrab," said his father, "come!"

"Ah, Sir!" said he, "I know not what I do."

"What!" said Zaul, with impatience in his tone; "what say'st thou?"

"Thy son is not worthy of thee," said Zohrab.

"Ah!" said the father, "and wherefore?"

"The princess—Amima," said Zohrab, in a faltering and supplicating tone; "how can I go?"

"I see," said Zaul Khan, in a voice of anger and resolution; "I see thou art enslaved by a woman. Now, give ear; I who am thy father speak to thee; I, who have lived a life of danger and anxiety, all to come to this moment, address thee; if thou wilt witness his destruction, that of thy family and friends, the enslaving of thy country,—stay—stay with thy woman; put on her silken vests, and paint thy cheeks; but if thou art still that Zohrab

I have known thee, the pride of my heart, the glory of our country, then hasten without delay—a single thought more is death.”

Zohrab, with his senses almost in abeyance, with nerves unstrung, irresolute and weak from tenderness of soul and violence of love, at hearing these words, seemed at once to throw off the passing frailty of his nature, and seizing his father's hand, as if he had made a desperate wrench of every affection, exclaimed, “My father, I am yours to life and death—lead on.”

Zaul instantly darted from the room: but with all his suspicions awake, as he was about ascending the terrace steps he thought he saw a form crouched in a corner of the narrow passage: he sprang upon it, and there indeed he found a human being, who taking advantage of a deeply shaded nook, was cowering down in deep attention to what was passing.

Seizing him by the throat, he said, “Who are you? Speak or you die?”

Zohrab instantly put his hand forward, and feeling a protuberance on the back, immediately recognised the humpback. “’Tis the Goozoo!” he exclaimed.

The humpback, finding himself discovered, without uttering a word, rose to escape, but Zaul, who seemed to have been prepared for every emergency, as quick as thought, seized upon his victim, unrolled the shawl from his waist, secured his whole person by the inextricable folds of the camel tie, and then, with a firm and inexorable hand, forced a handkerchief into his mouth, so strongly that no gag ever more completely commanded silence. He then thrust him into the deserted apartment of his son, and closely followed by Zohrab, immediately ascended the terrace. Having ascertained beforehand what road to take, they scaled the first wall, hastily glided over an adjacent terrace of the chief executioner's house, which was situated close under the city walls, and throwing themselves into a deep shade, they took a survey of the nearest watch towers, in order to discover what sentries might be on the alert. The moon by this time had entirely disappeared behind the lofty Albors; dead stillness reigned throughout the city. “We will wait for the *next challenge from the sentries, and then descend,*” said

Zaul Khan. They perceived that within ten yards of the place where they stood, was planted one of the three pieces of artillery which served to guard the citadel, and Zaul, perceiving that the parapet threw a deep shadow inwardly, immediately crept close to it, followed by his son, until they came to where the gun threw a still darker shade. All at once they heard from the adjacent tower the cry of "*hazir*," which was echoed and repeated from one tower to the other quite round the battlements. Zaul then said, in the lowest whisper, "be now ready—all depends upon this moment." He then unloosed one end of the long rope that was wound round his body, and lashed it firmly to the gun carriage, then having waited a certain time to allow the cries of the sentries to subside; "Now, wretches! sleep on,"—exclaimed he; ye think ye have done your duty, with your drowsy *hazir* thrown from your throat—but Zohrab is ours—*Allah, Allah*, protect us."

Upon that they both crept through the mouth of the embrasure, and lowering the rope down the side of the fortification, they found that nothing could be more just to its measure than its length to the height of the wall. Zaul made his son proceed the first, who with cautious step, hand under hand, gradually descended into the very depths of the dry ditch, and landed in safety; he followed, and finding themselves at the bottom, in safety and at liberty, by mutual impulse they threw themselves into each other's arms, and again and again thanked Heaven for their safe deliverance.

It was at this moment that Zohrab, putting his hand to his arm to feel whether the armlet, that sacred gift of his beloved Amima, was safe, found it not there. A deadly apprehension overcame him as he felt over his person, but—he found it not—his agitation was immediately remarked by his father, who said, "What has happened—speak?" "Oh," said the grief-struck youth, "it is lost; let me return,—she dies if it be found!"—he was so overpowered by this thought that he trembled from head to foot, and so entirely unmanned was he, that it was with difficulty he could support himself. "Whatever it is," said the inexorable father, "lost it must be—to return is impossible—let us on!"

"My father," exclaimed the youth, "did you but know all, you would pity and help me."

"I do know all," said the Khan, "I would help you—but it is too late—we cannot return—be yourself, my son!"

"I would give up any thing; but, oh! what will become of her!"

"Zohrab," said his father, "again I say come on, this is not worthy of you." Then with difficulty at length he persuaded the reluctant youth to advance, who finding that it was now impossible to return, allowed himself to be carried onwards by his father's impetuosity.

To escape from the depths of the ditch, which was broken and rugged, and easy of access in many parts, was the business of a few minutes, and when once fairly landed on the plain, the father proceeded with a quick step through the cultivated fields, until they reached a certain tree, where to Zohrab's surprise they found a man awaiting them with three horses. Without a moment's delay they mounted, and were soon in rapid motion on the high road to Mazanderan. Zohrab, in other circumstances, would have been frantic with joy at finding himself once again on a saddle, but the loss of his armlet, which compromised the safety of Amina, in case it should be found in his apartment, depressed his spirits, and bore down his mind with the most dismal forebodings. His father said but little, and hurried anxiously onwards, keeping the road during the darkness of night, but striking into the untrodden country as the morning dawned. They travelled without drawing bridle until the close of the succeeding day, when having passed Firouzabad, and the well-known passes of the *Teng Shemshir-bâr*, they struck into one of the deep dells, which lead into the forests of Mazanderan.

During their passage through scenes so well known and so deeply impressed upon the mind of Zohrab as those of Firouzabad, and its neighbourhood, what else could occupy his mind but the recollections of her whose image was identified with his captivity, and the recent events of his life? He was riding onwards, entirely absorbed in his own thoughts, the horses of the whole party jaded by *extreme fatigue*, when their ears were struck with distant

shouting. Zaul's face, and that of their attendant (the groom who had conducted the horses) lighted up with joy as they caught the sound. "Did you hear," said the Khan, as he turned his ear to catch the distant shout, "did you hear that, Reza Kûli?"

"Yes," said Reza Kûli, "I heard. It must be they; *khoda shukiur!* God be praised!"

"Can you see any thing? In God's name look well," said the Khan.

Reza Kûli's eyes, like those of a lynx, were not slow in their search, and at length he said, after some hesitation, "Yes, I think I see a horseman on the brow of yon hill."

"I see him too," said Zaul. "let us on, it is one of their scouts." Shortly after they heard the report of a musket, "There they are in truth—'tis well—our luck is on the rise! Praise be to Allah, we have now nothing more to apprehend, ride on."

Pushing through a tract of thick brushwood, they made their way to some lofty trees, the first of those which fringe the great forest belt, that girds the province of Asterabad. Little by little they perceived indications of a bivouac. First two or three stragglers appeared, then a thin blue smoke was seen issuing through the trees; and at length they came upon a collection of some thirty or forty persons, who, as if by one common consent, left their occupations, and came to meet them. Some had been tending horses, others lighting fires, others seeking repose, but all now rushed forwards in joy. The first person whom Zohrab recognized was his uncle Mustafa, who threw himself into his arms with unaffected transport; then came the two Turcoman chiefs, who though less refined in the testimony of their satisfaction, could not rest until they had given him their warmest embrace. Every one seemed more occupied with him than with his father, who partook of the general joy quite as much as if he had taken no part in obtaining his release. Zohrab was affected to tears to find himself so suddenly surrounded by those so dear to him. Could he have banished from his mind all apprehensions concerning the fate of his mistress, he would have been supremely happy. Every individual present, after his own relatives and the Turcoman chiefs,

came in succession to kiss his hand ; he knew most of them by name, and they recollected him as a child. Some had almost seen him born, others younger had been his playfellows, and not even the meanest stable hind was there, who in some manner or other was not known to him. There they stood, the whole party backed by the thick forest scenery, in a rugged and picturesque group, feasting their eyes upon him, whilst scarcely any other words escaped their lips, than "*Mashallah ! shukiur Allah*, praise to Allah !" with variations of "God grant him protection. We are grateful. Blessings be on the prophet and the Imans !" and other such like exclamations.

After their raptures had in some measure subsided, their attention then turned towards the extraordinary man who had so ably planned and judiciously executed his son's escape. Standing in the group, still preserving his wild and grotesque costume of the dervish, although now unencumbered by the mysterious coil, he inspired awe in those who beheld him. Accustomed as they had been in the city to identify him with the character which he had assumed, they had almost forgotten that he was in fact their chief and their governor, but seeing him now in his true situation, the costume he wore served only as a memorial to remind them of what he had gone through, and of his great merit in the success which had attended his scheme. They approached him with the greatest reverence, the meaner kissing the hem of his garment, whilst the chiefs received his cordial salutation.

Horse cloths having been spread at the foot of one of the largest trees, the whole party adjourned thither to sit and take refreshment.

The first among them who broke silence was one of the old Turcoman chiefs, Deveh Aga, or the Camel Lord.

"Praise be to Allah," said he to Zaul Khan, "You have done great things. May your house always be in plenty!"

"By the beard of Omar," said the Blind Lion, "such another man in the world does not exist. We have done the needful on the Shah's father's grave!" at the same time he broke out into a chuckling growl, which was caught up and re-echoed by all the by-standing group.

"*Mashallah ! mashallah !* praise be to God !" said *Mustafa Khan*, emphatically raising his eyes to heaven, and

placing the back of his hands with the palms upwards on his knees, "we have got our Zohrab again. What have we not undergone! what anxiety have we not felt since that unlucky day when the poor hound breathed his last, to the present joyful meeting! Who would have thought when ruin threatened our home, when our country was about to be visited by the despotism of the tyrant, and when our friends would have been deprived of their independence, that all at once we should thus again be united, firmer and more resolute than ever to oppose the destroyer, and blessed by the presence of him whom we thought lost to us for ever! And, under Allah and the Prophet, who has done this for us? See, see, oh, my friends," pointing to Zaul Khan, "here is the man—this man wiser than Locman, stronger than Rustam, more generous than Nushirvan—he has conferred these benefits upon us."

"*Belli, belli!*" was heard from every mouth. And "God grant him life—may the Prophet protect him—may his son be like him!" and many such phrases were poured in sincerity into the gratified ears of the adventurous Khan.

"What words are these?" said Zaul Khan; "I of myself am nought;—give your thanks to that Being from whom all blessings flow. Whatever we have done is the business of fate. We left Asterabad at a lucky hour, and at a fortunate hour we are returned. Our son has been restored to us, what more can we want? In future, all our thoughts and endeavours must be directed towards defending ourselves against the Shah, who enraged as he will be at having been completely foiled, will not fail to attack us as soon as he gathers his forces together."

"Let him come," said the Blind Lion; "we will bring the whole of the Tekiah in a body against him."

"He shall find death behind every tree in Mazanderan," said the Camel Lord.

Zohrab, who during this conversation had stood before his father, (a custom so grounded in Persian manners that nothing can uproot it,) expressed a hope that he might be told how his extraordinary deliverance had been brought about. To this moment he avowed himself ignorant of every thing; for during the hurry and anxiety of their escape, he could not call upon his father to make expla-

nations. The plan pursued seemed to him so difficult, that excepting by miracle he did not conceive how it could have proved so successful. This request was confirmed both by the looks and wishes of those present, and they would willingly have postponed taking the rest they so much required, if Zaul, who never allowed himself to be surprised into an imprudent act, had not reminded them that they were not yet in safety, and could not call themselves so until they were within the walls of Asterabad; for he maintained that they might still be overtaken by the Shah's horse. All he could allow them to enjoy at present was a short repose, promising, as soon as they had reached their homes, to relate the long narrative of his adventures.

To this they consented, and having placed the proper guards, the remainder of the party were soon entranced in sleep. Long before the dawn, the indefatigable Zaul roused his companions, and again they were on their road through the sloping forests, which in rapid and dangerous descents led them from the elevated table land of Irâk into the low plains and jungles which gird the Caspian Sea, and render Mazanderan a country so difficult of access.

At length, having descended the rocky defiles of the shaggy Sandûk, gradually they wound into better paths, until at length they reached the causeway, one of the works of the great Shah Abbas, which kept at a distance the encroachments of the exuberant and rank vegetation.

Zaul Khan, finding that they were now scarcely more than a few hours' distance from their city, called a halt, and proposed that some one should ride forward to announce their arrival. Every one seemed ready to start on so grateful a service, but none so intensely expressed his desire as Zohrab, to whom every path, and even every tree in the country, were as well known as the faces of his dearest friends. Although his father and friends would have been proud to exhibit him to the inhabitants as they flocked out to meet them, yet so strongly did the desire to embrace his mother show itself, although unexpressed, that at length he was permitted to proceed.

"It is better that it should be so," said Mustafa Khan; "let him see his mother first, and then he will be better able to attend the *mejlis*, the assembly afterwards."

The overjoyed youth impelled his horse forwards, and threading his way along the nearest paths, soon found himself within sight of his native place. The intense longing which filled his breast to embrace his mother and to see his home, now absorbed every other feeling, and even the image of his beloved Amima was for a time obliterated.

It was towards the close of day that he reached the city gate, which, although it was now allowed to remain open during the day, still was not left unguarded and unwatched. The same old soldier who, as our reader may recollect, had recognized from the wall the faithful hound Hemdum, was seated at the entrance of the draw-bridge, and as he observed the approach of a stranger apparently in important haste, he arose and retreated towards the gate itself. But his attention was too much attracted by the horseman's appearance to allow him to think of any thing else. His well-trained eye, accustomed to a quick scrutiny of every object requiring watchfulness, at once recognized the well-known form of his young lord. He put up his hands, put them down—would have run forwards, then turned about and came back again; his utterance was stopped, his senses seemed bewildered at the apparition, until Zohrab had approached so near that all he could do was to stand stiff in his place, and open his eyes with a half idiotic half sensible smile.

"*Ahi*, Osman, my uncle!" cried out the enraptured youth; "is it you?—don't you know me?"

Again he spoke, before the old old man could be roused from his astonishment, when running forwards, he seized his young master's hand, and kissing it over and over again, exclaimed, "*shukuir Khoda!* thanks to God! in truth it is he. Heaven has blessed my eyes once more with your presence. Your place has long been empty; let me run to the palace." He then would have preceded him to give the news to the city; but Zohrab, who like his poor faithful dog was almost ready to drop from fatigue, would not allow himself to be outstripped, and impelling his tottering horse into his last gallop, reached the gate of his father's house before he could be announced.

The old porter was acted upon nearly in the same

manner as the old soldier had been, by the sudden apparition of his young master; his bent back almost turned straight, and his withered eye shot a bright ray, as he saw him dart by, and all he could utter was "*Allah ho acbar*, God is great!" Zohrab had just time to call to him by name, and rushed onwards to the well-known gates of the harem. His heart beat with a redoubled action as he paused at the threshold so near to that spot which had witnessed his first entrance into life, and which was endeared to him by every tie and every recollection. He was so affected by the anticipation of all that he was about to witness that he could scarcely find resolution to proceed. He would have continued in this state of indecision, until perceiving the old porter hobbling towards him with officious affection, he at once drew back the curtain and entered.

CHAPTER III.

"There is no virtue in loving a moon face, but the blessings of Allah be upon him who reveres a grey head."

SAADE.

The scene which presented itself to Zohrab upon his drawing back the curtain was this. In the principal room, opposite to him, with the heavy casements open, was seated his mother conversing with two of her neighbours; on the outside stood a black slave in attendance. In one corner of the court was a servant pounding tobacco. In another were two maidens spinning. The uplifting of the curtain of the harem being no uncommon occurrence, excited no attention, and it was not until Zohrab was fairly in the centre of the court that his presence was perceived, when those of the women who first caught sight of him seeing it was a man, uttered a loud shriek, which roused the attention of the rest. It was then that Zohrab's mother, at the first glance, recognized her son, and, forgetting veil, slippers, and acts of courtesy to her guests, almost at one bound she found herself fast

locked in his embrace. It would be doing but little justice to the warmth of eastern feelings to attempt their description by words. The uplifted hands, the bursts of exclamation, the reiterated expression of thanks to God, the ardent looks of love reciprocated between the parent and the child; the expressive silence, and again a return to vociferous joy, are all too varied, too quick in their transitions, to be given by words. The feelings which arose between Zohrab and his mother may be conceived in some measure from the former parts of our narrative; and it was long before their first emotions could sufficiently subside to allow the youth to give an account of his own adventures, and of those of his father and the depuration. It required a long time for him to meet the inquiries of every individual which composed the establishment; he was almost as much the child of the older servants as he was that of his own parents; the whole city was soon acquainted with the joyful tidings, and from all quarters the inhabitants flocked to get a glimpse of their lost young favourite.

The first act of his mother, after her joy and astonishment were a little abated, was to spread her praying carpet, and return thanks to God for the blessing conferred upon her. Her son was not backward in following her example. Although his past life had been so full of adventure, yet the moment he reached the paternal roof he seemed at the same time to return to every habit which was common to it, among which that of a constant reference to the all-wise Providence of heaven was the principal.

Zohrab had scarcely had time to give a short outline of his captivity, and of the circumstances attending its course and its termination, to his mother, ere her feelings of tenderness were again roused by the arrival of her husband, and then, indeed, with their son before them, did they heartily reiterate their thanks to God, for his restoration.

The city by this event at once assumed a new aspect. Instead of the abandoned and desolate appearance which it had acquired by the absence of its governor, activity and bustle were infused into its inhabitants. Immediate steps were taken to place it in the best posture

of defence. A message was despatched to the encampment of the Turcomans upon the plains of Kipchâk, in order to call in a strong detachment of men to garrison the walls, in conjunction with the people of Asterabad. Guards were placed at each gate, and every thing resumed its former warlike and rebellious aspect. Zaul Khan, during his rapid journey from Tehran, had planned a scheme of defence for his city and its territory, the details of which were so familiar to his mind, that without delay he gave his orders for their execution. He knew every pass through the mountains and through the intricate jungles, with all the intimacy of one of its own wild animals, and there he laid his picquets and planned his ambushes. He ordered the city walls and gates to be examined and repaired. The Turcoman chiefs sent to their different camps with directions that every provision in corn and rice should immediately be despatched to the city; as many animals as were superfluous were sent to the plains, and nothing was left undone to meet that attack which it was likely would immediately be undertaken by the Shah.

Zaul Khan, on the day of his arrival, gave a *ziâfet*, an entertainment, to all the principal people of the city, as well as to those who had formed the deputation. He exhibited but few of the luxuries of the capital; his life was very much like that of his allies, the Turcomans, living in tents and possessors of cattle; but what was wanting in delicacy was made up in abundance. After it was over, and the guests had washed their hands and smoked their first kalioun, he expressed his readiness to gratify the curiosity of the *mejlis*, by a relation of his adventures since he had left the city.

Every one present was delighted, and none more so than his son, who stood at a respectful distance, until his father ordered him to be seated, which after some hesitation he obeyed, but at the outermost place and on the very margin of the nummud.

The Khan then began as follows :—

“It will be recollected that on the day of the departure of the deputation from Asterabad, the aspect of the stars was most favourable, and that the astrologers asserted that no enterprize was ever commenced under better

auspices. We left the gate precisely at the appointed minute, and let us all allow that, by the blessings of Allah and his holy Prophet! nothing has ever so completely and entirely succeeded; therefore do not suppose that what I am about to relate of myself, is said in self-commendation, for I attribute all to the direction of a higher Power, and therefore I can claim no merit to myself. I will say with Ferdùsi, 'O God, whatever I am 'tis thou that hast made me!'

"You will remember that when I left you at Toweh under the pretext of illness, I did so in order that the change in my person which I had contemplated might be known to as few persons as possible. It was only known to Mustafa Khan and two others. As soon as the deputation had proceeded on its road, my first operation was to shave off my beard, that beard which you all so well remember, and the loss of which I deplored as much as if I had been abandoned by my most intimate friend. This has been the sacrifice which I have most felt since my departure, and I could never have thought that the cutting off a few useless hairs would have cost me such sincere regret. I felt like one deprived of a limb; it was my resource under all circumstances:—if pleased, I stroked it: in anger, I pulled it hard; in heat, it refreshed me; in cold, it kept me warm. But I need not speak of the loves between me and my beard, for all you who possess them no doubt feel the same tenderness towards your own!"

Upon this there was a general stroking of beards throughout the assembly, the two Turcoman chiefs excepted, who could only make play with the four or five bristles which nature had given them at the end of their bony chins.

"I had allowed the hair of my head to grow untouched; it had acquired some length already," continued the Khan, "and I encouraged it to hang over my face; these shaggy eyebrows for which I was famous, I also shaved off; and so otherwise did I fashion my face, that I leave it to those who know me best, to say whether, with the addition of my dervish's garb, my disguise was not complete. It was night when I rejoined the party at the *Teng shemskir bûr*, and when I tried my assumed

voice upon almost every individual of the cavalcade, I was happy to find that no one could recognize the tones of Zaul Khan. In short, no scheme of concealment ever succeeded better, and so far I was well pleased with my essay.

"Having reached Tehran, I took up my quarters near the embassy, and soon succeeded in making myself known throughout the city. I frequented the bazars, the maidans, and the mosques. I declared myself to be a complete fakir, a *gûsheh nichîn*, a sitter in a corner. My principal doctrine was contempt of life and of the world. I rejected every luxury and coveted every austerity. With the happy application of scraps of poetry, which I appeared to compose impromptu, but which I had arranged at my leisure, I quite took the minds of my hearers by surprise. I was compared to Aflatoon, Socrat, and Locman, by the first mollahs, even to my nose; so true is it, that in novelty of any sort either merit or its contrary are exaggerated far beyond their reality. I rejected applications from the Shah to appear before him, and in proportion to the increase of my impudence I rose in the opinion and estimation of the public. In the meanwhile, I lost no opportunity of acquiring information upon every thing which might advance the ultimate object of my scheme. Very soon I became acquainted with the situation and the neighbourhood of Zohrab's place of confinement. I learnt the character of those in whose hands he was placed; every detail of the projected marriage between him and Zulma was made known to me; and I soon formed a proper estimate of the dangers, physical as well as moral, of his position.

"I naturally expected that on the day of the audience which the Shah would give to the deputation, when he found I was not present, that his anger would be roused, and that we might expect the most serious results from it. Consequently I determined to produce myself in my most adventurous act of impudence. Good fortune declared on my side, for on the preceding day I had become acquainted with a Frank mollah, a man who was acquiring great influence in the city, and who by the strange doctrines which he expounded had roused all the Ulla-

mah against him. The Shah ordered him to his presence, and pleased as kings are with a new toy—let it be a new minister, a new palace, or a new mistress—our tyrant was taken with the shorn chin, the close-cut garments, and the strange appearance of this infidel. Among his accomplishments he professed a knowledge of medicine, and as the Shah is very anxious to shelter his person from harm by every means in his power, he applied to him for talismans and nostrums for that purpose. It appears that this sort of Frank is impressed with the strange belief, that if any man, be he who he may, will but kiss a certain cross, that this act is one of the first steps, so he conceives, towards making a convert to his way of thinking in matters of religion. He therefore made the Shah believe that his cross was a talisman containing within itself the power of preservation from harm, and that if he would wear it next to his heart, and occasionally kiss it, no harm could ever accrue to him; and the Frank, moreover, informed me, that on that very day, the Shah had received such a talisman from his hands, and had inserted it within the folds of his caba. I treasured this fact in my mind, as I did every thing which directly or indirectly might bear upon the Shah's character. The details of our first audience and that day's events are too well known for me to repeat, but I must own that when the Shah cast his scrutinizing glances upon my face and person, when he began to doubt my veracity, and when he talked of requiring a test of it, my heart began to sink within me, and I despaired of success. But as soon as I observed him to put his hand within his vest, and when, with his hand extended, I heard him require to be told what it contained, then the whole extent of my good fortune flashed upon me, the Frank mollah's anecdote came to my recollection, and I believe inspiration came to my help. In four lines I told the king, without his being able to misunderstand me, what his hand contained.

"I perceived that my triumph was at once effected; from that moment the Shah placed the greatest confidence in me, although every now and then he gazed on my face with looks of inquiry as if he recognised my features, in a manner far from satisfactory.

"Again my good fortune was favourable, for soon after

the Shah consulted me upon the health of his niece the lady Amima. Ever since I had heard of the adventure of Zohrab our son at Sawachi, and had ascertained beyond a doubt that he must have spoken to and seen the face of the princess, I was convinced that they could not have met without feelings of great interest towards each other, and every thing which I learnt since my arrival at Tehran, confirmed my suspicion. No one could ascertain the cause of her disorder. Previously to my seeing her I visited the Shah's *Hakim Bashi*, or physician in chief, and what he said proved that the seat of her malady was in the mind; for, from all my inquiries, I could not discover that it had affected the body.

I soon made up my mind how to act. After I had asked her a few preliminary questions, in order to ascertain whether my suspicions were well founded or not, I at length mentioned Zohrab's name, when at the same time I held her hand. The agitation which immediately ensued proved that I was right; and when I taxed her with loving him, the distressing effects which my words produced told me at once the whole story. Before I left her I determined to ascertain the extent of Zohrab's temptation and danger, in order to judge how much he too might have caught the infection, and as I drew back the curtain which separated us, I saw her face. Old as I am, the sight of so much beauty, so much loveliness, such softness and modesty, had the effect of enchantment upon me; what, therefore, must it have been upon the feelings of youth?"

The eyes of the assembly were here turned upon Zohrab, whose serious and averted countenance showed how much he was affected and interested by this part of his father's narrative. He would, indeed, have left the room at this passage of it, had he himself not been too anxious to learn what was in fact of the greatest interest to himself.

His father continued: "I then became convinced of his great danger, and that his confinement as a prisoner and a hostage, were but slight miseries compared to the tortures of his unhappy and hopeless passion. I was visited by the princess's attendant, who, thinking that her *mistress* might be living under the influence of sorcery,

or the evil eye, sought from me a charm to destroy it, and a talisman to secure her from harm. Possessed of the knowledge which I had just acquired, I surprised her by forestalling her before she had said a word upon the nature of her errand, for I had recognised in her attendant one of those who had conducted me to the princess's apartments on the day of my visit, and thus judged from her appearance who she might be. I wrote the charm, and used it in furtherance of my scheme to destroy the interest which the princess took in the fate of our son.

"The great object which I now had in view was to obtain an interview with Zohrab himself, and hitherto nothing had happened which gave me the least hope. He was watched with the greatest vigilance. Every hint which I threw out to the Shah of the necessity of releasing the oppressed, and Zohrab in particular, was opposed by a very reasonable answer, namely, the necessity of waiting till the arrival of the chief of the deputation. There was one circumstance, however, from which I expected some opening, and I was not disappointed. I knew the whole extent of the love which the chief executioner's daughter bore to Zohrab, and of her rage and disappointment at being slighted. I was every moment in expectation of being applied to by the despairing maiden to use my powers upon the heart of the cruel youth in her favour; and truly I was not mistaken. I now became so sure that Zohrab's deliverance was near at hand, that I took every precaution in my power to forward it. I got acquainted with the king's *mermerbashi*, (architect,) and from him I learnt the exact dimensions of the walls of the citadel situated close to his apartment. He gave me the height of the wall, and I immediately made more rope, adding it to that which I habitually wore round my girdle, in order to possess a sufficient length by which to secure our escape. It was in the evening after I had returned to my cell, and as I was taken up in plaiting my rope, that a soft step announced a female visitor. The moment she began her narrative I knew who she was, and my measures were soon taken. I now felt that the whole game was in my hands, and I acted accordingly. I sent horses to await us at a certain spot in the plain. I advised Mustafa Khan to get the whole of his party with-

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of my narrative will sufficiently explain what I mean. It is impossible to turn midnight into noonday, except by patience; but let the day come when energy to obstruct a foe is required, and bravery to face danger, and I will forfeit this poor head that our son does not shew himself the least backward to meet the approaching storm."

"What words are these, Zaul Khan!" said the Camel Lord; "sorrow must have its course like the mountain torrent; it rages at first, overflowing its banks—it gradually lowers into a moderate stream, and then flows on doing all proper good. Shall we ever forget that youth in the *chappaws* of former times. Such a man of the sword has not been seen in Irân since the days when white devils were to be killed in our forest, and since the slaying of the giant Koulzum."

"With Zohrab at my side," said the Blind Lion, "I care not for a thousand Shahs, and his *zamburek* and cannon to boot. What can they do in this wilderness of wood, where men must go by single files through passes narrower than a camel's mouth, bordered by trees from which guns may be fired as quick as puffs from a *kalioun*."

Nothing, indeed, could be better than the spirit which Zaul Khan found to exist among his followers and the people of Asterabad in general. Every one seemed willing cheerfully to make every sacrifice rather than submit to the Shah, and appeared anxious to second any measure of defence which he proposed. Mustafa Khan, who was as keen a politician as his brother, though not endowed with the versatility of his talent, his enterprize, nor strength of character, had, during his stay in the capital, secured by presents and address the friendship and goodwill of many of the principal men about the court, and there was every probability that, should the king lead his forces against Asterabad, much advantage might be gained from their interference. Thus fortified in every way, did they set about the work of defence with the greatest alacrity, and in their endeavours to prepare for the Shah's reception we will for the present leave them.

CHAPTER IV.

A man's mouth may be too full, as one may have too much of happiness.
TURKISH SAYING.

ZULMA had passed a wakeful night in her own apartment, expecting the dawn, with all the fever and anxiety of a lover awaiting the moment of meeting. Too impatient to stay until the sun was actually risen, she crept without noise to her favourite terrace, in order, if possible, to catch any sound by which she might draw some omen favourable to her passion. The morning was still as death. She lent a quick ear to the hostage's place of confinement—she could perceive no trace of the dervish—but a strange noise struck her ear. It was as that of some one choaking, or practising the first act of expectoration, accompanied by some shuffling of feet and struggling. She listened again and again, putting first one ear to the sound then the other, drawing back the long tresses which hung about her face, and at each moment uttering a faint exclamation of surprise.

These sounds rather increased than diminished. "What can have happened?" said she to herself; "can the monster have harmed the youth?" Still, in her superstitious fear of disturbing the operation of the charm she ventured not to stir, but remained fixed, alternately watching the tinges of the sky and the rising sun, and listening to the uncouth sounds which came from the chamber below. Her mind was gradually working up into a state of apprehension, that through her interference and the agency of the dervish, she might have been the means of producing some dire mischief, and that the hostage's existence might be at stake. Therefore, losing all patience, she determined at once to clear up her doubts. One great snort, which she heard as she rose to go, quickened her steps, and in the course of a short time she found herself at the door of the mysterious chamber. There lending an attentive ear, all her fears were confirmed. The choaking, grunts, and struggles had increased to a frightful degree, and she could not but conclude that her lover was at his

last gasp. She threw open the door, which had been carefully closed, and there, although the curtain over the window was lowered, she discovered, not the beautiful youth of her heart, but the pinioned humpback. Such was the transition from apprehension of evil to the certainty of security, that her first impulse was to break out into immoderate laughter; and, indeed, the object before her was well calculated to excite it. He was rolling about the room, performing feats similar to those which one may have seen a beetle perform on the high road when struggling with a ball. His head, knees, shoulders, and hump, seemed all brought together into one knotted mass, bound so ingeniously together that the hands could in no manner perform their office, whilst the feet having been placed from off their perpendicular could no longer be of use as a pedestal. His hideous face was distorted out of all shape, every feature of it being thrown into a wrong place. The mouth was distended in so extraordinary a manner, that it now looked as if it were the orifice of a dirty clothes bag over-filled, whilst the eyes, naturally small at the best, had now almost totally disappeared. What with struggling—what with his efforts to expel the gag, the poor wretch had changed his colour from its own ghastly yellow to a livid purple, and it is probable that had not Zulma come to his rescue, he could not have lived through the day to tell his own tale. Though convulsed almost into hysterics, she ran to him, and with one jerk as she wrenched the horrid rag from his mouth, she had the pleasure to see his jaws come together again with a lively snap. It was then that he began to roar and to draw largely upon his lungs, feeling pleasure in once again putting those vital parts into motion which had almost been suspended. During these preliminaries, she sought for the end of the bandage which was bound round him, and at length, with the utmost difficulty, succeeded in loosing one hand, and then the other, until at length she released him altogether. From a state of vigorous irritability, the exhausted humpback now lay almost inanimate, uttering ever and anon in low-drawn moans the following words:—"Ahi, they with burnt fathers!—Ahi, those procurers!—Ahi, they with improper mothers! I have defiled their father's graves!—Asses have loved their

mothers!—Curses be on their sister's progeny, and on their mother's too! See what they have done!—they have killed me!—I am a done man! Where can I run to, to drink their blood? Please God, please God, there is still time;—give the *Goozoo* a world to work in and he will ye out!—Ah, ye wretches, whose fathers are burning in Jehanum!”

When he had come to himself, and he could pay attention to his deliverer, he related all that had befallen him. She was persuaded in her own mind that the ill success of the charm was owing to the interference of the humpback, a warning which she had previously received from the dervish, and she was therefore slow in believing the facts which the injured man asserted.

“This was predicted to me,” said Zulma; “the dervish assured me if any one interfered the charm would be broken.”

“What dervish? what charm?” exclaimed the angry barber; “why will you go so far out of your way to believe such balderdash? He was no more a dervish than I am an angel, and possessed no charm beyond the power of uttering falsehoods of the largest dimension. Open your eyes, as you love Allah!—you are neither a child nor an ass;—see your error. That ill-born knave was no less a person than Zaul Khan, father to the unsainted Mazanderani boy. They are both fled. Their last act was to bind ill-fated me into one unmanageable lump, and leaving me with a mouthful of rag, and my legs and arms bound tighter than those of a new-born babe, they turned their backs upon the beard of the Shah, and are no doubt ere this half way to Asterabad. But let it be—I am the *Goozoo*. If there is a path for a snake through the woods of Mazanderan, the Shah's army shall find it, and if there be one dog of them alive this day six months—one mother's child of the whole race of Asterabadis—then say that the humpback has a face free to be spit upon by every fool in Persia.”

The disappointed and dejected Zulma now gradually began to undeceive herself, and the illusion in which she had allowed herself to live, dropped from before her understanding like scales from before her eyes.

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"What shall we say for ourselves," said the humpback, "when the Shah asks how and where we found the armlet? It is all very well to get one's neighbour's head cut off, but let us secure our own at the same time.

"*Ali*," said Zulma, "let me but see her torn in a thousand pieces, I care not what happens to me; death is preferable to life under circumstances such as these."

"For the name of Allah," exclaimed the alarmed liar, "do not talk thus! recollect that I have no rival!—that I am no lover!—that I entered into this business solely and entirely to please you! Do not let the innocent suffer for the guilty. What can we say to the Shah?"

The maiden sat in moody silence, her heart torn by a thousand contending emotions—the more she thought of her loss—of all that had taken place, and which had deprived her of Zohrab, the less she cared for her own safety. But her crooked companion was sorely put to his invention, to fabricate the protecting lie, that was to secure his own head. He began to feel of how much more consequence his own carcase was to him than that of his fair neighbour, and putting her, her father, and his family, out of the question, he thought of nobody but himself.

"Tell the truth," said Zulma, "tell exactly how it happened," excited by her reflections into a state of heroic indifference. "I care not for the consequences. Whatever is, so be it."

"Tell the truth, indeed!" exclaimed the humpback, in a lengthened tone of astonishment. "Are we mad! has sense taken leave of our brains! Shall we increase the imputation of being asses which the dervish has thrown upon our heads, by continuing to be so! No, no! if ever ingenuity was wanted 'tis now. 'A lie which gives security, is better than truth inducing strife,' said the sage Sheikh. He said well—well did he say—and by the beard of the prophet so we will act! Let me see, what can we devise? I have found it—I have it—thus, in the first place, what is the use of saying that you went to seek the dervish? Why publish your weakness to the world? Why invite every cow with a beard to laugh at you?"

"*Hold*," cried Zulma, "speak, but do not increase my

misery, by odious words thrown into my face." "Therefore, we will simply say," continued the barber, "that I heard a rumour in the city that a more than ordinary stir had been remarked among the Asterabadis and the Turcomans; that many of them had been seen issuing from the gates of the city, and that consequently, in order to ascertain the safety of the hostage, I proceeded to the place of his confinement, which I found open and vacant—that there was every appearance of his having made his escape, and that on searching his apartment this armlet was found. In corroboration, I will say, that he was seen from the terrace of your father's house descending from the Princess's turret. Have I said well?"

"Say what you like," said Zulma, "let them take our souls from us; I care not."

"*Astaferallah*, God forbid," exclaimed the *Goozoo*. "Life is sweet, and without it how shall we enjoy the revenge which we are about to take. *Mashallah*! there is still much happiness left for us. Why should you be thus cast down? Light of my eyes, open your heart."

"Happiness!" exclaimed the afflicted Zulma, with a sigh. "Whatever you may feel, I know and care not—but happiness is lost to Zulma for ever."

"But recollect," said the barber, "nothing must be said of the state in which I passed the night; it must not be known how effectually my mouth can be stopped, lest on future occasions such a method might again be adopted. It must not be whispered how securely I was bound, and how oft I rolled over and over on this floor; the city would not cease laughing from this till the end of time. May its liver descend and its soul be dried up! But see," said he, "the sun is up, I must be gone, or the Shah will be inquiring for me; he is up too. Now be collected—drop your midnight excursion—say nothing of gags and bandages—and only wait till you are called upon, to swear that you saw Zohrab descending from the turret. Go now, in God's name go! or else we shall be found here together, and then who can save us?"

This truth effectually roused the disconsolate Zulma,
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and without saying a word more she left the apartment, and reached her own room unobserved, whilst the barber took his way to the palace to perform his usual morning operation upon the person of his royal master.

In the meanwhile a strange commotion and stir had taken place among the *keshekchis* or guards of the city gates. It had, in fact, been remarked that many Asterabadis and Turcomans by two and three at a time had left the city, and that they had not been seen to return; this circumstance had been reported at early dawn to their general, one of the highest officers about the court. He had no sooner heard it than in great alarm he mounted his horse and rode straight to the abode of the deputation. To his utter surprise he found it untenanted. No trace of either chiefs or subalterns, Asterabadis or Turcomans was there, save some *yaboos* and mules of no consequence, kitchen utensils, and some heavy baggage, with which it would have been dangerous for them to have been encumbered. All their famous horses were gone. In short, it was plain that they were fairly off. It was suggested that they might have received permission from the Shah, or his vizir, to go to the *Ziaret** at Shah Abdul Azîm, and happy at a gleam of hope, the general of the guard immediately despatched a horseman to that village to make the proper inquiries. It would require about an hour to go and return, and during that time he made up his mind to sit upon the carpet of patience, and smoke the kalioun of expectation. It was suggested also, that inquiries ought to be made of their mehmandar Shir Khan Beg, who probably might be better acquainted with their movements than any other person. A message was instantly sent to him, and before the general could smoke his second kalioun, this self-important personage appeared.

When the first ceremonies had been performed, the general said, "How is this, sir mehmandar? Your charges have disappeared; can you give us any account of them?"

"What words are these?" said the consequential Beg. "My charges! I am neither their slave nor their

* A famous place of devotion near Tehran, the shrine of a saint.

servant; nor placed as a watch over them," looking significantly at the general. "The Shah has confided the whole of the negociations into my hands. Those who have wit are called upon to use that wit; those who have eyes only, and no wit, are called upon to use those eyes. Shir Khan Beg, after all, is not a *gholam shah* for nothing," said he, looking with complacency over his well-dressed and we will add, well-made person.

"Say what you will," said the general, "you will not make me believe that words have no meaning. Mehmandar has a signification or it has not. It implies one who has the care of guests, or I do not know my own tongue. How then can he have the care of them if he be ignorant whether they exist or not. By what account do you calculate?"

"By what account, indeed!" said the enraged gholam; "can I sit at every gate in the city to watch their movements, and be in seven places at once? No lynx ever did that, with all its eyes; none but a general of Kechekchis can do it, who, instead of taking his rest in the soft cushions of his anderoon, ought to be ever on the stir; awake to every thing, and with all his numerous guards at command no mouse ought to creep out of the walls of Tehran without his being apprized of it.

"What words are these, you little man?" said the general, whilst the pride of a Kajar mounted into his head. "Will you teach me my duty? you, who are scarcely wise enough to keep your horse and musket in order, and gallop after the Shah? Go, go, sir! seek your cows of Turcomans and Asterabadis, and let us know why they are absent."

"I am not your servant," said Shir Khan, with a disdainful look, at the same time drawing up his handsome mustache to the corner of his eye, "I have no account to render to any one save to the Shah; and upon that he arose in great form, and said, "may Allah take you into his holy keeping, and may your shadow never be less!"

He was not, however, in the least easy in his mind at the absence of his charges, for such they were, and his apprehension was much increased when he heard from the returning messenger, that they were not to be found at Shah Abdul Azim, nor any village in that direction, but

that on the contrary, in the market-place, peasants had reported that they had been seen on the road to Mazanderan, travelling with every appearance of haste. Indeed, every one who was in the least connected with the care of the Asterabadis and Turcomans, began now to have fearful apprehensions of the results that might accrue to them from the Shah's violence owing to this unaccountable event. The general of Kechechis was slow in making up his mind to the necessity of informing the Grand Vizir of what had taken place, and Shir Khan Beg himself, who foresaw all the disasters likely to fall upon the many individuals upon whom the anger of the king would be sure to alight, was far from not placing himself among that number, however advantageously he might think of his own precious person.

The commotion increased as the day advanced. It became generally known throughout the city, and every one who had relations of business with the individuals of the embassy, were seen running to and fro to the place which they had inhabited; some alarmed lest they should not be paid their dues, others delighted at having got rid of their creditors. It was expected at the great selam at noon that the whole matter would be made known to the Shah, and then those who were to blame would be punished. Every body, in the contemplation of such violence, looked melancholy, and were afflicted by dismal forebodings; for when once the anger of the Shah was roused, no one, innocent or otherwise, could at all be certain that the blow might not alight upon his own head.

CHAPTER V.

Your place is empty!

PERSIAN COMPLIMENT.

THE humpback entered the Shah's apartment with a cautious and timid step, as he usually did, but instead of *approaching* at once to take possession of the head upon

which it was his duty to operate, he stood aloof, throwing a most dolorous expression into the cast of his features, and putting his hands before him as if he would speak before he began to work.

"What has happened?" said the Shah.

"*Hitch*, nothing," answered the humpback; "your slave is waiting for a favourable moment."

"What words are these, varlet," exclaimed the Shah; "is the fool mad also?"

"Were your slave mad it would be well for him," said the barber. "A thing has happened—"

"And suppose it has, what then?" said the king; "is every fool in our kingdom to make a long face because a thing has happened?—Speak."

"As I am your sacrifice," said the humpback, "the Mazanderani—"

"What of him?" said the king, quickly; "he won't marry the executioner's daughter, we know that—so be it. Let him wait till his father's arrival."

"He will not wait," said the other, in a low and subdued tone.

"Not wait?" said the Shah, in an angry voice. "Are ye all mad? To-day he waits—to-morrow he won't wait—what words are these?—is this to be told the Shah?—explain."

"He will not wait, because he is gone," said the humpback; looking with great scrutiny at the Shah's turn of countenance as he spoke the last three words.

"Gone," repeated the king: "whither is he gone?"

"As I am your humble sacrifice," said the barber, "his room was this very morning found empty, and he is supposed to have fled the city."

"How—when—where? Speak!" said the king, his anger kindling as he uttered the words.

"The representation of the less than the least to the asylum of the world, is this:—Late in the day of yesterday, your slave heard that many of the Asterabadis and Turcomans had been observed issuing from the gates of the city; and this morning it struck him that there might be something more than common in this, and as a precautionary measure, your slave determined to ascertain whether the hostage was in safety. Your slave went to

his apartment, and to his surprise he found it vacant—there was every appearance of his having taken his departure; but how and whither is still unknown to your slave.”

“And the Asterabadis and the Turcomans,” said the king; “what of them?”

“As I am your sacrifice, they are gone too,” said the barber.

“Where is the wild dervish—the dervish Hezzarpi-eh?” said the king, as he put on a thoughtful look.

“By the head and salt of the Shah,” said the barber, “I know not; it did not strike your slave to inquire.”

“Here *bachchah*, children,” the Shah roared out to his attendants, upon which Sadek appeared, to whom he addressed himself—“Go to the cell of the dervish, and bring him hither without a moment’s delay. Let the prime vizir, the chief executioner, and the head of the guard be at hand. Let the king’s scarlet cloak be in readiness, and see that a full band of *ferash ghazeb*, of executioners, be in attendance at this day’s *selam*.”

The blood run cold through the persons of his hearers as these words struck their ears, for well did they know what they portended. Sadek made his exit with all haste to execute his orders, but the humpback was destined to witness the lighting up of the fire of which he had laid the fuel. The dropping of the under jaw, the twitching of the mouth, the uplifting of the brow, and the vibration of the ears, all indicated the gathering of the storm, and come it did with a vengeance truly terrific.

“And I have been weak enough,” said the Shah to himself, in a low and growling tone, “not to give heed to my suspicions. If we have indeed been laughed at, let those who laugh now look to themselves!”

The barber stood in fear before him, watching the uprising of his anger, uncertain whether or not he should be allowed to proceed in his morning’s operation; he very soon saw, however, that until the fury of the storm had spent itself, it would be madness to put himself in its way.

Sadek soon returned, and stood before his master.

“Has the dervish been found?” said the king; “where is he?”

"As I am your sacrifice," answered, Sadek, "he is not in his cell, and no one has seen him."

"It is even as I thought," mumbled the king to himself, "this must have been Zaul in person; no other man in Persia could have done this. Cause an instant search to be made for him and the hostage Zohrab, throughout the city," he roared out in angry tones. "Let the country around be scoured in every direction, and send a strong detachment in the direction of Asterabad, and let every man who may be on the road be brought before us."

The ordinary mode of transacting business was, that each head of departments should receive their orders from the king himself; but on such occasions as the present, when the more persons he saw, the more he was anxious to proceed to punishment, Sadek himself, with that lurking principle of good which at times bestirred him, undertook to be the dispenser of the royal commands. The whole city and surrounding country were soon thrown into active search, and consequently scenes of injustice and cruelty took place, which are unknown excepting in the abodes of despotism. Every house was forcibly invaded, extortions ensued, private revenge found its opportunity, and a general fear and insecurity pervaded the whole community.

In the meanwhile, the prime vizir, the chief executioner, and the head of the royal guard, severally appeared before the Shah, and it was not long before every great officer of state was assembled at the royal gate, in readiness to answer questions, and to await the royal pleasure.

By this time the whole scheme of Zaul Khan for the rescue of his son had flashed across the Shah's mind, and he saw in the most vivid colours the extent of the trick which had been upon him. That which at any other moment would have excited his utmost admiration, now only served to work up his feelings to the highest pitch of irritation. He was accustomed to look upon himself as the most quick-sighted and penetrating of human beings; what then was his mortification to find himself thus completely outwitted, and by one whom he so entirely despised! The feeling was maddening to the highest degree—he could scarcely contain his wrath from falling upon the whole city at once, so enraged was he at the situation

of a dupe in which he thought he was placed. He fancied that he could detect the whole of his subjects laughing at and exulting over him, and in his mind's eye, saw every man's finger pointed at him in derision.

The respect which he paid to his grand vizir, restrained him from using violence towards his person; but the moment he saw the chief executioner and the head of his guard, he fell upon them with the ferocity of a tiger. Without asking them a single question, he roared out to the ferashes in attendance—" *Bezun, bezun!* strike, strike these ill-begotten varlets," and before they could make the smallest remonstrance, they found themselves on their backs, their feet in the air and showers of blows from green poplar sticks pouring upon them. Most unluckily for them, as soon as the Shah had waved his hand to cease, Sadek stood before the king holding a coil of rope in his hand.

"What is that?" said the king.

"As I am your sacrifice," said Sadek, "this was found tied to a gun near the house of the Nasakchi Baschi, and suspended from the wall into the ditch."

"It is the dervish's," said the Shah; "of that there is no doubt. Let all further search cease; it is now plain whence he and Zohrab made their escape." Then turning to the culprits who had been punished, he said—"Do you see this? From the house of one he escapes, and under the very nose of the other he scales our castle, and laughs at our beard. Dog's sons! is it thus you do the king's business? Lay on again, in the name of Allah!" he cried but to the ferashes; "and, mind ye! the Shah is looking at you." Upon which the poor men were again put to the torture, nor did this cruel operation cease until they were carried away insensible from the presence of the tyrant.

At every moment some new report was made to the King, which kept up his anger, and excited him to further violence. At length it was said that the dervish, in company with a woman, had been seen after midnight walking towards the chief executioner's house. This roused all the humpback's attention, and he immediately felt that, should this fact be investigated, he would be *implicated, and then indeed what fate would be his!*

The Shah ordered that the man who had seen the der-
vish so accompanied, should be brought before him, when
one of the guards, a rough man, more dead than alive, a
livid paleness shewing itself under the roughest of beards
and the most hairy of faces, was thrust forward and stood
before the King.

"Who are you?" said the Shah.

"What do I know?" answered the poor man in a state
of utter amazement."

"As I am your slave," said Sadek, seeing the unfortu-
nate creature's disturbed state, "he is a Kechekechi."

"What did you see last night?" said the king.

He endeavoured to stammer out some prefatory expres-
sions of humility, but utterly failed, and at length said—
"I saw the man of God and a woman."

"Why did you not seize them?" Can such people
walk about at night with impunity in my city? Mirza
Hajji Ibrahim," turning round to his grand vizir, "what
news is this? The orders of the Shah are looked upon as
nothing."

"As I am your sacrifice," said the Vizir, "there has
been great neglect of duty."

"Why did you not seize them, O little man!" said the
king to the kechekechi.

"What do I know," answered the bewildered wretch ;
"I was afraid."

"*Mashallah*!" roared the king, his eyes firing up with
rage. "Wonderful servants have we! And who was the
woman?"

At this question the humpback began to feel very un-
safe.

The poor kechekechi, having mustered up a little cour-
age, answered—"As I am your sacrifice, I believe it was
the *Bibi Nasakchi*, the lady executioner."

"In the name of Allah, who?" exclaimed the Shah.

"As I am your slave," said the humpback, who found
it high time to speak, "he means the begum Zulma, the
chief executioner's daughter; but that cannot be, as I
know she was in her own anderoon at that hour. It
has come to your humble slave's recollection, that perhaps
what he found in the hostage's room when he visited it
this morning, may throw some light upon the inquiries

of the asylum of the world." Upon this he drew forth from his bosom the armlet.

The Shah had no sooner received it into his own hand and cast his eyes upon it, than his whole nature seemed to undergo a quick revulsion. It was his turn now to tremble—but it was the tremor of jealousy, of rage, of abhorrence, of maddening fury. Breathing short, and evincing much prostration of strength, he said slowly to the humpback—"So you found this in Zohrab's room?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the crafty wretch, "I did."

"And where?"

"Near the youth's pillow," answered he, with a significant look. The king drank these words as if poison had been mixed with them. He said nothing. His head sank dejectedly on his breast. Every sort of feeling, from the deepest tenderness to the most deadly revenge, ran in quick succession through his frame. At one moment his beautiful and retiring niece stood before his imagination in all the modesty of her nature; at another he saw her in the arms of his young prisoner, whilst he felt that he himself was the object of their derision. It was but a short time since with his own hands he had given her the armlet, which had belonged to her father: to find it restored to him in this manner, and with this story attached to it, was more than he could bear. His first impulse was to order instant execution upon her who had excited his wrath; but so malignant were his present feelings that he seemed to have pleasure in dwelling upon them, in order that he might devise a more sweet and perfect revenge. The pause, the awful pause, which ensued during these his cogitations, was felt by those present as if they stood on the verge of eternity—as if they were awaiting the signature of their death-warrant, so sure were they that none but the most dire results could accrue from the delay. The eyes of all present were turned towards the dreaded awarder of their fate, in deep and breathless silence; it seemed as a mockery upon their misery, if the leaves of the surrounding trees even ventured to be agitated by the breeze, or the splashing fountains to throw out their refreshing waters.

At length rousing himself from his apparent stupor,

like the deadly boa rising from torpor and preparing for a fresh victim he wreaked the first effects of his rage upon the poor *keshekchi*. "Strike his neck," he roared out to the full extent of his terrible voice, as he looked upon the offender. "Go, and let others know what it is to be negligent of the Shah's affairs."

Upon this a *ferash ghazeb*, a most ferocious monster, stepped up, and with one blow of his sword, severed the wretched man's head from his body.

We will spare our readers the horrid acts of cruelty which succeeded this iniquitous execution. After he had begun the exercise of his power in his inner apartments, the tyrant transferred himself to the great *Dewan Khaneh*, at his usual mid-day hour of giving audience, called the *Salam i Aum*, and there, clothed in his blood-coloured cloak, he gave full scope to the sanguinary dictates of his nature. It would be shocking to the feelings of those who only hear of executions, after long and tedious investigations, and in solitary and marked instances, to be told the numbers of innocent as well as guilty persons who, almost without a reason, and all without a hearing, fell under the suspicions and the consequent death-stroke of this odious king. But let it not be thought that his subjects thought the worse of him for thus using his power. Instead of exciting feelings of opposition to his rule, he only the better secured his authority. 'Tis true they would call him a *shaitan*, a devil, a blood-drinker, a despot, but then at the same time they would add the epithet *ajajib*, wonderful, which in most of their minds would also imply "*admirable*." "*Ajaib Shahi*, wonderful king!" would they say of him. "If you want a lord of the sword, look to him—our king is indeed a king. Whose dogs are the Moscovites before him? You may talk of the Franks, their discipline, and their artillery: we spit upon their fathers' graves." 'Tis thus the Persians would rave in praises of their sanguinary king, and in this instance those who did not come under his displeasure were all in his favour, inasmuch as they felt that he had in fact cause for the exercise of his displeasure.

Among others, our garrulous friend the boasting mehmendar, had hitherto escaped observation, and standing in the midst of his companions, having thrown his cap

and without saying a word more she left the apartment, and reached her own room unobserved, whilst the barber took his way to the palace to perform his usual morning operation upon the person of his royal master.

In the meanwhile a strange commotion and stir had taken place among the *keshekchis* or guards of the city gates. It had, in fact, been remarked that many Asterabadis and Turcomans by two and three at a time had left the city, and that they had not been seen to return; this circumstance had been reported at early dawn to their general, one of the highest officers about the court. He had no sooner heard it than in great alarm he mounted his horse and rode straight to the abode of the deputation. To his utter surprise he found it untenanted. No trace of either chiefs or subalterns, Asterabadis or Turcomans was there, save some *yaboos* and mules of no consequence, kitchen utensils, and some heavy baggage, with which it would have been dangerous for them to have been encumbered. All their famous horses were gone. In short, it was plain that they were fairly off. It was suggested that they might have received permission from the Shah, or his vizir, to go to the *Ziaret** at Shah Abdul Azîm, and happy at a gleam of hope, the general of the guard immediately despatched a horseman to that village to make the proper inquiries. It would require about an hour to go and return, and during that time he made up his mind to sit upon the carpet of patience, and smoke the kalioun of expectation. It was suggested also, that inquiries ought to be made of their mehmandar Shir Khan Beg, who probably might be better acquainted with their movements than any other person. A message was instantly sent to him, and before the general could smoke his second kalioun, this self-important personage appeared.

When the first ceremonies had been performed, the general said, "How is this, sir mehmandar? Your charges have disappeared; can you give us any account of them?"

"What words are these?" said the consequential Beg. "My charges! I am neither their slave nor their

* A famous place of devotion near Tehran, the shrine of a saint.

servant; nor placed as a watch over them," looking significantly at the general. "The Shah has confided the whole of the negotiations into my hands. Those who have wit are called upon to use that wit; those who have eyes only, and no wit, are called upon to use those eyes. Shir Khan Beg, after all, is not a *gholam shah* for nothing," said he, looking with complacency over his well-dressed and we will add, well-made person.

"Say what you will," said the general, "you will not make me believe that words have no meaning. Mehmandar has a signification or it has not. It implies one who has the care of guests, or I do not know my own tongue. How then can he have the care of them if he be ignorant whether they exist or not. By what account do you calculate?"

"By what account, indeed!" said the enraged gholam; "can I sit at every gate in the city to watch their movements, and be in seven places at once? No lynx ever did that, with all its eyes; none but a general of Kechechis can do it, who, instead of taking his rest in the soft cushions of his anderoon, ought to be ever on the stir; awake to every thing, and with all his numerous guards at command no mouse ought to creep out of the walls of Tehran without his being apprized of it.

"What words are these, you little man?" said the general, whilst the pride of a Kajar mounted into his head. "Will you teach me my duty? you, who are scarcely wise enough to keep your horse and musket in order, and gallop after the Shah? Go, go, sir! seek your cows of Turcomans and Asterabadis, and let us know why they are absent."

"I am not your servant," said Shir Khan, with a disdainful look, at the same time drawing up his handsome mustache to the corner of his eye, "I have no account to render to any one save to the Shah; and upon that he arose in great form, and said, "may Allah take you into his holy keeping, and may your shadow never be less!"

He was not, however, in the least easy in his mind at the absence of his charges, for such they were, and his apprehension was much increased when he heard from the returning messenger, that they were not to be found at Shah Abdul Azim, nor any village in that direction, but

office, and he in vain tried to say the usual "*Corban et shuvum*." His jaw vibrated, and that was all.

"Speak!—where have been your eyes!—a man was seen descending from the turret!" said the Shah, the words scarcely finding utterance from his choaking throat.

"A man!—*Astaferrallah*!—Heaven forbid," said the poor wretch. "We know nothing of him. By the head of the Shah—by the salt of the king—your slave falls from the skies. What news is this!"

By this time the deputy of the Khajeh Bashi had also been brought in, and he being a man of nerve, said, with all the humility possible, that if any thing of the sort had taken place, it must have been when there was so much difficulty in making way to the turret chamber through the Banou's apartment, when the Shah last visited the lady Amima.

These words excited all the Shah's curiosity, and when the chief guardian, upon recollection, confessed that he had seen a collection of shawls tied together, hanging from the window frame in the turret, and that he had suspected that all was not right, conviction flashed upon the Shah's mind that the sacred precincts of his harem had been betrayed, and that his niece was guilty.

He required no further investigation—his mind was convinced—he dismissed every one from his presence, and he seemed to court solitude as a relief;—but far from being a relief it was increase of pain. The fire which raged in his breast, only burnt the more fiercely from the constant excitement of his own thoughts—a thousand resolves passed in quick succession through his mind; they all terminated in violence, but no violence which he could devise appeared to him sufficiently seasoned by revenge. It must be said that the sort of passion which he entertained for his niece was in no wise that of a lover for a mistress; it was a devoted tenderness, a sense of gratitude towards her for allowing him to feel that at least there was one creature in the world who cared for him. This hope he now learnt was a mere illusion of his brain; a false hollow sentiment; and the consequent reaction, added to that of offended pride at the violated sacredness of his dignity, and of every other feeling which can most wound a Persian's honour, worked him up almost to

phrenzy. "She dies!—she dies!" he was constantly repeating to himself, as he rested his head on his hands, occasionally rising from his seat and walking to and fro. He devised many schemes for putting his intention into execution, but none accorded with his feelings. He thought of the turret as a fitting place to hurl her from; but he dreaded lest her cries might alarm the harem, who would rise in her favour. At one moment his fury roused him to do the deed himself. At another he would have seen it perpetrated before his eyes, in order that he might enjoy her sufferings; but when the moment for decision came, he found that in fact he was afraid of confronting her, so much did he feel how completely he was in her power when they were face to face.

At length he made up his mind, as to the best mode of effecting his purpose, and this was, to order her destruction without again seeing her. Sadek was a man in whose fidelity he knew he could trust, for he had never deceived him. His dogged resolution and courage were proof against every thing, and to him he determined to entrust the accomplishment of this dark deed. Accordingly he summoned him, and when he had ascertained that they were entirely alone and no ears within hearing, he caused him to approach almost within whispering distance, and then in a low and suppressed tone he said, with all that earnestness of manner for which he was famous—

"Sadek," he said, "I have ever been satisfied with thy services. Thy king now requires a proof of thy devotion, which he can trust to none other than thee." The words which he was about to utter appeared to choke him. Calling up a long drawn sigh, and using great violence upon himself, he said—"Amima dies! I have said it. Take her hence this night—never let me see her more. Go—shew her this—(giving him the arm-let)—it will explain all.—Go—"

He would have said more, but respiration almost failed him. Sadek, in wild consternation, would have answered and remonstrated at this cruel order; but the King made him signs, such as belong to a maniac, to be gone: and knowing what the reaction might be if he pressed the matter too hard, he kissed the ground and left the presence.

CHAPTER VI.

The lady pressed her coal-black steed,
The slave he rode before;
Onward they sped o'er deserts wild,
Her home she saw no more.

EASTERN BALLAD.

ANIMA had been made acquainted with the events that had taken place as they occurred. Zohrab's flight, the one which had most interested her, although at first received with a pang, yet on the whole gave her a true and sincere pleasure. That one moment which had assured her of his love, was at present a sufficient reward for every evil, and as she felt aware that in their present circumstances, by no combination in their favour could they have been united, so, the next thing to wish for, was his personal safety, and that she now felt was secured. She and her attendant Mariam, had been discussing over these events till late in the evening, and the usual profound stillness which reigned over the royal harem had long remained unbroken, when at the farther end of the court they heard the voices of men, accompanied by footsteps, as if they were proceeding towards them.

Conscious that she might be implicated in the Shah's wrath, however innocent, should Zohrab's visit to her apartments ever come to light, she could not fail to entertain great apprehension and fear, every time that any unusual noise was heard, or any strange person was admitted within the walls of her domain. As the footsteps approached, their fears were more awakened, and they became intense as soon as the curtain of her apartment was thrown on one side, and the Khajeh bashi, with his deputy, stood before them. In the Khajeh bashi's looks, too, there was a sinister and mysterious expression, so different from his usual most cringing, most abject manner, that Anima felt there were good reasons for her fear. Mariam's colour forsook her, and she stood like *one on the point of execution.*

"What has happened?" said Amima, putting on a resolute look. "Why do you disturb us thus late?"

"The Shah requires your attendance," said the eunuch.

"Why so late?" said the maiden. "This is unheard of. We are going to rest.

"The orders of the king are absolute. *Bismillah*, in the name of Allah," said the inexorable man, with a dogged impertinence, quite foreign to his usual manner.

"But how? where?" "Here, Mariam," said she, "give me my veil and *chakchurs*," trembling with agitation.

"There is no necessity for a veil. Come quickly"—said the khajeh bashi.

"What insolence is this," said the Princess, her blood excited by this want of respect. "I go before the Shah, and willingly; but of this be certain, the first words I utter will be complaint of thee. Will the Shah consent to see his niece exposed to the gaze of man without her veil?"

Upon hearing these words the hideous creature indulged in a malignant exulting chuckle, as if he would have said, "Do thy worst, I laugh at thy threats."

This caught the attention of Mariam, and she was struck at once with the true meaning of his exultation; then every feeling of love and devotion for her mistress rushed into her heart, and seeing the danger which awaited her, and feeling that she was the cause of it, she bounded forward, and in accents of madness, as she threw her arms round her person, swore that no one should take her hence, and that nothing should separate them. Upon this the strong arm of the deputy khajeh, was called into action by orders of his chief; but notwithstanding his interference he would scarcely have mastered her, had not Amima herself commanded her to desist from further resistance. "I will go, Mariam," said she. "The Shah is just, though he may be violent. He shall learn all, and then be assured he will forgive that which he at present knows but imperfectly."

Upon which the heroic maiden, merely throwing a shawl over her head, left her peaceable and cherished

apartments, and with a determined step followed the Khajeh bashi. Mariam would have followed also, but she was forcibly detained by the deputy, leaving the now unprotected and destitute Amima to listen to her sobs and wailings as she followed her conductor along the dark still courts of the harem. It was a trying moment to her fortitude; never had she been permitted to stir, without the attendance of more than regal state. What a contrast to her present forlorn situation! Her spirits kept up as she proceeded through the two or three courts which it was necessary to cross in order to reach the Shah's apartment, but when she found herself led on in a different direction, and taking her steps towards one of the exits of the harem, her heart sunk within her, and the most dismal forebodings came across her mind. In addition to the principal entrance, which is a lofty porch, guarded by a considerable body of black slaves, there is a secret portal, so small that it requires the person passing it to stoop, and it was hither the Khajeh bashi conducted our heroine. It is situated immediately on the brink of the ditch which encompasses the Ark, and a small byepath leads to the drawbridge, which enters upon the great square of the city. With difficulty it was opened seeing that it was but seldom used, and only upon secret and mysterious occasions, such as the present. After much exertion, at length the Khajeh bashi forced it open, and there in the gloom of the night she could just discern a man, holding two horses. The old eunuch, who held a small lantern in his hand, raising it, exhibited to the eyes of the trembling maiden her future conductor, completely muffled up from head to foot, as a disguise to his person, and who immediately advanced one of the horses towards her. Here her heart had nearly failed, and she inquired from the Khajeh bashi, what this all meant, and why he did not take her to the Shah?

"Mount this horse," was all the answer she received.

"I go not," said Amima, roused into anger, "until I see the king."

"Speak not, but mount," said the hard-hearted wretch.

The forlorn maiden now discovered the full extent of her danger, and the horrors of death, such as she knew *had before been frequently inflicted upon unfortunate wo-*

men, burst upon her senses, and harrowed up all her fears. The more she persisted in not stirring till she had seen her uncle, the less did the wretch in whose hands she was, seem to respect her;—at length, she said—“Tell me, in pity, why am I brought here? What is my crime, that I am treated thus like a common criminal?”

Upon this the demon in human shape, who stood near her, holding up the light with one hand, with the other exhibited to her eyes, in a manner not to be mistaken, the cherished though mischievous armlet. At the sight of this further explanation was unnecessary;—the whole extent of her misfortune was placed in the strongest colours before her, and the executioner's arm was scarcely required, so totally had life apparently forsaken her frame. This agitation, however, did not to all appearance excite any pity in her conductors; an interval was allowed her to recover, when the muffled up figure approached to assist her to mount, and from him she thought she heard the words “fear not,” spoken in a scarcely audible whisper, which in some measure gave her courage. With difficulty she was seated, and then, without more ado, the new conductor mounted the second horse, and guiding hers by a leading string, slowly took their way along the narrow path on the limits of the ditch, and straightway crossed the drawbridge. The horses appeared to be of the finest quality; they threaded the mazes of the city in a quick amble, and when once they had passed the gates, which were opened and shut again in a most mysterious manner, without a word being spoken, they struck into a rapid pace, which very soon became a gallop. Without speaking, the mysterious conductor dashed onward with increasing velocity, scarcely looking back, and apparently unconscious whether what was placed upon the horse which followed him was a living creature or inanimate lumber. Onwards they went—the plain of Tehran was rapidly crossed—the intricacies of the intervening mountains were as quickly passed; nothing stopped their career, the horses only seemed to acquire fresh vigour from the intenseness of their speed, and the ground disappeared from under their hoofs with an ease and facility that was almost superhuman. So strange, so appalling, but at the same time so invigorating was the situation in which

Amima was placed, that with her senses bewildered, and her body in violent action, she could in no manner collect her thoughts. Her mysterious conductor rode onward some three yards before her, and all she could discern in the darkness was a mass, bounding before her, which she seemed ever on the point of overtaking, but which was always there, neither further nor nearer. At length the delicacy of her frame began to feel this great and continuous motion, and she ventured to utter a low shriek of remonstrance. Her conductor heeded it not ;—nead, shoulders, legs, and horse went bounding on, up and down, up and down, as if it had been a machine set to perform a certain piece of work, totally divested of hearing or sensation. Again she shrieked, louder and still louder. She might as well have complained to the wind ; not the slightest notice was taken of her. By this time they had crossed much of the high road to Ispahan, and as they came to the confines of the Great Salt Desert, slanting to the east, they struck into a track of the most naked region of wilderness, apparently without the vestige of a path to direct them, and nothing but the first dawn of day to give light to their horses' footsteps. Here their speed appeared to increase ;—it seemed as if a new world, one which the imagination might create to itself as a type of the regions of future punishment, was spread before them ;—a soil arid, thirsty, and sulphureous—with no vegetation save here and there long withered rushes, creaking to and fro before the blast, broken up into fantastic shaped masses, which crumbled into forms of hideous angular faces, or gigantic monsters. This was the region, over which no Persian ever travelled without putting up prayers for a safe journey. It was famous throughout the country as the resort of *ghouls* and wood demons, and having accomplished it, he blessed his prophet for a safe deliverance from danger.

A low moaning wind was wont to blow over the waste, which sometimes increased into furious blasts, and at others died away into melancholy murmurs. Rising at break of day it gained strength as the sun rose, and continued to blow with more or less violence during the twenty-four hours. As the two horses and their riders *bounded over the cheerless wilderness*, they might have

been taken for the genii of the place—their appearance a dark outline, their speed unchecked, and their direction apparently undefined, seemingly bent on business of mysterious import, maintaining an awful silence, which was broken ever and anon by wild screeches from the suffering maiden, which were borne unheeded away upon the passing blast.

The wretched Amima was now almost entirely exhausted; her guide seemed, however, to keep one steady, undeviating line, towards a mound of curious and abrupt form, that rose conspicuous, though but little, above the surface of the surrounding wilderness. The same deserted and uninhabited character reigned throughout the region over which they passed, as far as the eye could reach, and they now appeared further than ever from the abode of mortals; when of a sudden the mysterious guide stopped; the horses, all panting, but still not distressed, stood with their heads towards each other; the wretched Amima, more dead than alive, almost dropped off her horse as her disguised companion helped her to dismount. His manner was respectful, but as he neither spoke nor gave her the least sign of recognition, she could not discover who or what he was. She now would have thrown herself upon his mercy, but when about to address him, to her utter horror and dismay she saw him again mount his horse, and leading off the other, dart from before her with the same reckless and unrelenting speed. He merely disengaged a bundle which had been hanging at his saddle-bow, and threw it towards her; she thought, however, that as he darted off, she heard him again repeat the words, "Fear not!" which he had used on their first meeting. Her heart drooped in despair when she listened to the sound of the horse's hoofs as they gradually died away upon her ear; all the horrors of her situation now came pouring upon her imagination, like hideous phantoms, passing in grim array before her, until she saw death in all its various and most appalling shapes. Her beautiful form covered with a shawl, her head supported by her hand, rested against a projection of the arid soil, and seemed like a creation foreign to the horrors by which she was surrounded. She first dwelt upon the pangs of famine, then she thought of beasts of prey, of the famish-

ed wolf, or the wild hyæna, which she knew were common to this track. Again she dreaded to become a prize to the famished vultures of the desert, who so mysteriously gather together apparently by one common consent. Thus abandoned, thus hopelessly left to die, she dropped on her knees, and there, in the midst of this howling wilderness, was to be seen her angel form, imploring in the most ardent and heart-rending accents, the assistance and mercy of that Almighty Being, whom she knew and felt to be the refuge of all his creatures. Every act and thought of her past existence were brought before her, as if she were actually called upon to give an account of her conduct in this world, and with all the real humility of her nature, she deplored her unworthiness, and prayed for forgiveness. This exercise soothed and refreshed her, but still fear predominated; every sound of the passing blast, every rustle of the withered reed, made her blood creep, and conjured up a thousand real or imaginary dangers.

In the meanwhile, the day had dawned, the east was slightly streaked with red, and the hideous landscape was now sufficiently lighted up to exhibit all its deformity. Objects became more distinct in the west upon which the light gleamed, but as seen opposed to the rising sun, were not immediately to be recognized. The maiden's eyes were turned to that direction. Of a sudden she perceived something move upon the verge of the horizon; it was evidently a living object; it moved onwards and towards herself. Immediately all her fears were roused; she thought she discerned the wild animal so much dreaded. Her mind was not insensible to the fear of supernatural beings; the midnight spectre; the ghoul, that searcher for corpses and lover of human flesh; every horror which she had ever heard in her infancy, repeated to her in maturer years, and now rendered certain by the power of her imagination, came before her mind, and as the being approached, her eyes became fixed; she would have screamed, but could not. She at length gave utterance to one long, agonized cry, and then all animation leaving her exhausted frame, she fell into a state of total insensibility.

This so much dreaded being was nothing more or less

than a creature of flesh and blood, in the shape of a youth of about fourteen years of age. He was a fine, well-made, hardy-looking boy, wild in his appearance as a child of one of the rural gods might be drawn ; very rudely clothed, his hair hanging wild and unshorn about his shoulders, and bearing every appearance of living almost in a state of nature. Upon hearing the cry uttered by the affrighted maiden, he looked about him in amazement, such sounds being totally foreign to his ear, and at length he discovered her. He approached with a slow and cautious step, as if she had been an animal of a new species, and when he had fully distinguished her whole form, his eyes became rivetted upon her beautiful face with such intensity, that he appeared like one transfixed. Thinking her asleep, he was cautious in his approaches, but when he remarked the paleness of her cheek, and her death-like appearance, he feared that she might be dead. His young heart had never before known this state of perplexity, an object at once so new and so attractive had never before met his eyes, and he remained, with outstretched neck, staring eyes, and open mouth, uncertain what to do—to leave her there, and seek for assistance, or to help her himself. The latter resolve at length prevailed ; summoning all his resolution he went close to her, and first touched her face with the tip of his finger ; it felt as cold as stone ; this gave him courage, for she stirred not, and he then uplifted her hand ; he thought he saw her move, and in order to ascertain this, he began to rub it with all his might. This indeed roused her, and he was overjoyed ; he continued his efforts, until, to his delight, she opened her eyes ; but when she caught the first glimpse of the youth, she gave so sudden a scream, that he bounded back in alarm. At the sight of one so strange and so wild, her strength returned almost suddenly, and she immediately arose, when clasping her shawl about her face so as to screen it, she retreated some paces. He, on the contrary, advanced ; but with a manner so respectful that she soon bade adieu to alarm on his account, and ventured to speak to him. “ Where am I ? ” said she ; “ as you are a Mussulman, and love Allah, speak ! ”

The wild creature, hearing sounds so sweet from a

mouth so bewitching, almost danced for joy ; and lent his ear to catch their meaning.

"Who are you?" said she, trying him upon another subject ; "whence come you?"

These words he immediately understood, and he answered, "I am Ali Murad. Do you know me?"

"But what are you?" said she.

"I am my father's son," said the simple creature,

"Where do you live?" inquired the maiden.

"Even here," answered he. "Come, come!"

"Who is your father?" still inquired she.

"He is Hussein, the white beard," he answered. "Do you know him?"

"What is his business?" said Amima, with great eagerness.

The boy looked sad, and made no answer at first. Then, with a sigh, he said, "*Hitch*, nothing." After this, putting up his hands to his eyes, which he shut, said sorrowfully, "He is blind!"

Amima cast her eyes about, searching for the habitation which the boy seemed to point out as near at hand, but in vain. At the same time she discovered her bundle, which she eagerly opened, in the hope of ascertaining by its contents what might be her fate ; but all she found was a complete suit of a woman's dress, adapted to the wants of a well-clad peasant, and a purse of money. In vain she turned over in her mind what this could mean, and the only conclusion at which she arrived, was, that her destruction was not intended. So far there was consolation in the discovery ; but when she turned round, and saw the hopeless state of abandonment to which she was thrown, and the companion allotted to her, her heart sunk within her. She followed Ali Murad, as he led the way, and the first sign of habitation which she saw was a well, to the neighbourhood of which she probably owed her preservation ; for he evidently had come hither to draw water. Upon passing the mound before alluded to, towards which the mysterious guide had bent his steps, they came immediately upon a low clay-built hovel, scarcely from its colour to be distinguished from the soil upon which it stood. It was rudely covered over with bram-

bles, upon which a coating of clay had been placed. In front it presented a door and two paper-covered windows, and to all outward appearance was the abode of the most wretched of Persian *rayats*. Hither, however, the boy conducted the forlorn Amima, looking into her eyes to discover her surprise and admiration at the sight of what he supposed must be the most magnificent of mansions.

Preceding her some steps, he rushed into the hovel, and soon after came forward, conducting a blind man by the hand. Although dressed in the rudest manner, with clothes of the most common materials, yet his whole appearance announced great dignity. Though his eyesight was gone, yet the expression of his countenance was noble and commanding. His beard, blanched either by age or misfortune, swept his girdle; and upon seeing him, an internal conviction was produced that he was one who had known better days.

As he advanced towards Amima, led on by Ali Murad, she heard him exclaim, "A woman, did you say, Ali Murad? How, in the name of Allah, came she hither?"

"Here she is," said the boy; "speak to her."

Amima, upon perceiving this person, felt for him all the respect which his appearance would command; and dwelling upon his fine features, expressive of kindness and benignity, with the rapture of one who, having been exposed to great danger, had at length found safety, she approached him with confidence.

"Is it true," said the old man, "that thou art a woman, sick, and in distress? Who, and what art thou? How camest thou here? The desert is no place for such as thee."

Amima was distressed at these questions; for she knew not what conduct to adopt, in a situation to her so new and so embarrassing. She became shy at answering them, and, unwilling to discover who she was, determined to say nothing on that head for the present. She answered generally, that by the most unaccountable violence she had been dragged from home, and as she unwittingly had given rise to some person's enmity, had been thus abandoned in the desert, and probably left to starve and die. "But see," said she, "the providence of God! You are come to my assistance, and in you I claim a protector."

"Whatever we possess is yours," said the stranger.

"We are creatures of the wilderness. Excepting shelter for your head, and food to keep you alive, we have little else to offer; but to that you are welcome. Come, take your rest."

As they advanced towards the house, Hussein Aga, in a strong voice, cried out to one within, who appeared to be a third inmate, to come forth; when an old crone, almost bent double with age, came hobbling out. She received his orders to take care of his new guest, and very soon prepared so to do, although her surprise at seeing Amima was such, that she could scarcely refrain from muttering "*Ajaib!*" and "*Allah, Allah il Allah!*" for the rest of the day—so wonderful did it appear that any thing mortal could have found its way into the depths of the wilderness.

The cottage was by no means so small as on its first appearance it promised to be. It contained a small inner room, which the old woman inhabited, and which she now made over to Amima. Though rude in its materials as any peasant's hovel, still it was clean; the walls thereof were whitewashed, and it had the proper complement of furniture common to every Persian room, namely, a carpet and three nummuds. Here her hospitable friends invited her to take the rest which she so much wanted; and although the bed which they spread for her use was sufficiently rude, yet such was the fatigue she had undergone, that it answered as good purpose as the luxurious couches which she had so recently left, and very soon she had forgotten her miseries in that temporary cure of all evils—a sound sleep.

CHAPTER VII.

Two cocks fought one day. The vanquished fled, and hid in a secret place.

LOCMAN.

AMIMA having had time to collect her thoughts, was now fully persuaded that the Shah had intended her death, but that through the interference of some kind person her life had been spared, and that she had intentionally been placed where she now was. However dismal might be the prospects of her future fate, if she were indeed destined to pass her existence, in this place of exile, still she was safe; the vicissitudes of life were such, particularly in so unsettled a community as her own, that the same destiny which had thrown her into the desert might again take her from it; and gilding the horizon of her future prospects with a bright ray of hope, her mind could look forward to the time when, forgetting her present miseries, she might be united for ever to the man of her choice. Her most urgent desire now was to learn of whom she was the guest. It was evident that her silver-bearded host was a personage of consequence, about whom there was much mystery, and whose seclusion was like her own, caused by fear of detection. To this his appearance, his manner, and language bore testimony; and as the person who had thus thrown them together, must have done it intentionally, it was evident that his object could not be that of keeping them unacquainted with each other's situation. She determined therefore upon the first opportunity to make known who she was to the old man, upon a promise that he would confer a similar favour upon herself.

This opportunity was not long wanting. As soon as she had been refreshed by rest, having returned her thanks to Allah for her deliverance from danger, she left her chamber and sought her host.

He was seated in a corner of his own miserable room, counting his beads and repeating his *Astafarallahs*, with an expression of content and resignation imprinted upon

his features, which seemed to say how much habit had reconciled him to his present forlorn state.

As soon as he heard her approach, her light step being a sound totally new to him, he immediately recognised her, and said, "*Bismillah!* come and sit near me, O daughter! Let not a broken and sightless man like me frighten thee. Whoever thou art, may God's blessing be upon thee!"

"Pray for me," said Amima, affected upon hearing these kind words. "Pray for me, father—I seek your protection—May your shadow never be less!"

"You have been in my mind," said the old man, "ever since you have been here. Your coming is wonderful. By what stroke of destiny you have found this hole in the wilderness, has not yet reached my understanding. Ali Murad tells me, that every thing in you bespeaks a being of a superior order. He talks of your clothes as things to which his imagination has not yet reached, and of your beauty as of something surpassing belief. Speak, O daughter! say why are you come here; and, for the love of Allah, who are ye?"

The more the maiden conversed with the stranger, the more her heart inclined towards him. He had created a feeling in her breast which had secured all her confidence, and which urged her to keep nothing secret from him.

"Upon my eyes be it," said Amima, "I have nothing to conceal; but you must in return promise to relate to me your history; for believe me you have as much interested me as I can have interested you."

"I place myself in your hands," said he, with a slight hesitation in his manner. "You shall judge how far I can trust any one to hear my tale, when I tell you beforehand that I am not supposed to exist among the sons of men. I am looked upon as dead; and in truth I endeavour to think myself so."

"You can have no confidence in a stranger like me, I grant," she said; "but perhaps when you have heard my story, you will find that I am not totally unworthy of it."

"In the name of the prophet, speak on!" said the stranger; "I am impatient."

"It has often been the occupation of my solitary moments," said Amima, "to endeavour to call up some recollection of my father and mother, but in vain. I have in various ways heard much concerning them, but never has any distinct image of their persons been established in my mind. I was therefore quite an infant when I lost their protection. They have always been described to me as unfortunate persons, whose fates are mixed up with the many revolutions and scenes of horror which were common to Persia, before the present king succeeded in establishing a complete sway over the whole country. My father in particular was one to whom the vicissitudes of life were common. He was a brave soldier; sometimes a fortunate one,—possessing at one time great power and great riches, at another as much the contrary, reduced to a few followers from commanding armies, and living upon the wild fruits of the mountains, when before he had enjoyed the refinements of luxury."

"Allah! Allah!" exclaimed the old man, with the greatest interest in his manner, "you are relating my own history."

"As far as I can recollect of myself, I know that I had and have a brother, who is the only being" (here she faltered and blushed) "whom I really loved as a child. Of those under whose care we were placed I have no distinct idea, saving one old nurse who brought us up as a mother—but as I grew up I was surrounded by great splendour, I was flattered, I was called banou and princess. My clothes were those of royalty, my attendants were those of a queen, and I have always called the Shah my uncle."

"*Ahi*," said the stranger, "what words are you speaking! In the name of God, then, who was your father?"

"I was told he was the Shah's brother," said the maiden, alarmed at the great interest which she had created.

"And what is your name?" said he.

"I am called Amima," she replied.

"Can it be!" exclaimed the old man, in a transport of joy and astonishment. "O God! can it be? Art thou indeed Amima, daughter of Hussein Kâli? If so,

thou art mine—my Amima—my daughter! Where art thou?" extending his arms as he spoke; "come to me, my soul!"

It would be impossible fully to describe the sensations which arose in the breasts of both father and daughter. It sufficed that they identified each other. The miseries of the exile to which they were condemned seemed at once to have vanished. New feelings and new interests at once sprung up, and the wilderness by which they were surrounded no longer retained that horrid character which had before belonged to it. Amima, who willingly yielded to the joy of possessing a father, after having testified to him by every means in her power her determination never to leave him, but to devote herself to his comfort, expressed her anxiety to learn by what circumstances he had been thrown in the situation where she had now found him.

"The story is long, and it will require some time, my child," said the broken Khan, "to collect my thoughts, and revive my recollections of the past. Many years of utter solitude have almost made your father forget that he ever belonged to the community of man. It is difficult for the mind, which has acquired the habit of thinking solely of an hereafter, to return again to the things of this world. But tell me first of your brother. You mentioned him; and having regained you and hearing of him, I find myself as it were restored to life. Tell me, where is Fattah Ali? Does he live, or has the tyrant deprived me also of him?"

"He lives, and is well," said Amima. "She then related that part of his history with which she was acquainted; describing their last interview before he set off to take possession of the government of Fars, and cheered her father's heart by a most favourable account both of his person, his accomplishments, and his conduct."

"I am grateful to thee at least for that, O my brother!" said he, as he apostrophised the Shah; and giving way to an audible reverie. "Thou hast preserved thy nephew and thy niece, because thou hast been rid of thy brother." Then, seemingly absorbed in calling up recollections of the past, he said to his daughter, "It is so long since I

have retired from the world, that with difficulty I can recall the history of my past life, but it is of consequence that you should know it. I will give you the summary of it now, and you shall hear more of it in its different details, as they come to my memory."

"The maiden shuddered to think how much more than leisure they would be likely to possess for that purpose, but grasping her father's hand, she entreated him to gratify her curiosity, and having placed herself in an attitude of great attention, he thus began:—

"My father was a celebrated chieftain of the Kajar tribe, whose principal residence was in Mazanderan. His name was Mahomed Hussein Khan. He had two sons, namely, the present Shah and myself. When we were quite infants, Adil Shah, successor to the famous Nadir, took up his residence in Mazanderan, which obliged my father to leave his home in Asterabad, and seek refuge among the Turcomans. There my brother and I passed our first infancy, our father at the same time exerting himself to raise up enemies against Adil Shah, who had taken possession of the province over which he had formerly held full sway. Adil Shah, desirous of destroying so dangerous an enemy, by bribes managed to obtain possession of both my brother and myself, in order to secure hostages for my father's good behaviour. We remained unmolested for some time in his hands, but my father exhibiting some indications of disobedience, the cruel tyrant emasculated my brother, leaving me for a similar fate at the next appearance of rebellion which might be shown by our parent. Before, however, he could put his intention into execution, Adil Shah died, and we immediately returned to our father, who, finding himself free, raised the standard of revolt against Kerîm Khan, then the Vekîl, as he called himself, of Persia, and in possession of Fars; and leaving his woody fastnesses of Mazanderan, entered into the open country of Irâk, and marched upon Ispahan.

"My brother and I were then quite striplings—he about eighteen, and I one year younger. The cruel manner in which my brother was treated, had, at a very early period, impaired the original frame of his character;—from being of an open and joyous disposition he became

gloomy and suspicious, and although we were entirely brought up together, and although he loved me better than any other person in the world, if such a sentiment as love could ever find a place in his breast, yet even of me he was ever jealous, secretly hating that destiny which had made the hand of cruelty fall upon himself rather than upon me.

“He early began to perceive how inferior in person he was to those with whom he associated, and therefore turned all his endeavours to the improvement of his acute and intelligent mind, by which he gained an extraordinary ascendancy over every one with whom he conversed or transacted business. He also ceded to none in manly exercises; for though his person, to outward appearance, was wan and emaciated, still he possessed great muscular powers, and could endure as much fatigue as the hardest marauder. Although the youngest, yet I was more courted than my brother, owing perhaps to the superiority of my person, which most probably laid the foundation of that inveterate hatred in the breast of my brother, which in after-life so terribly broke out against me, and brought on my present misfortunes.

“My father, at the head of his followers, and supported by his son, met Kerim Khan's troops near Ispahan. This was the first real battle in which my brother and myself had been engaged, and never shall I forget the effect which it produced upon me. He, in full possession of his presence of mind, knew precisely what orders to give, and whither to direct the troops:—I was all fire and impetuosity, and only felt myself right as long as I remained under the control of my brother. The battle was a desperate rush on both sides, in which the numbers of Kerim Khan's troops overpowered ours, though we evidently bore off the palm in bravery. Unluckily, in the very heat of the fight, when we thought that victory was about to crown our exertions, my father fell dead from a musket ball which pierced his heart, and my brother, endeavouring to keep possession of his body, was surrounded and taken prisoner. A total rout of our troops immediately ensued, in which I was fortunate enough to make my escape, having the mortification to see my brother borne away hopelessly from me.

My father's followers having lost their chief, and seeing in me nothing but an inexperienced youth, soon left me and dispersed, some to their homes, and others forming themselves into small predatory bands, continued to infest the country. I was left almost entirely alone, only ten men of our own family and tribe remaining faithful to me. So little was I yet broken into the reverses of life, that not having learnt to put my trust in Allah, I placed my head upon my knees, and fairly cried for hours together. At length an old white beard of my father's, one of his *yuz bashi*, who had seen me born, and who had faithfully stuck by him in all vicissitudes, came to me and said, 'God is great—God is merciful—who can withstand destiny? I, whose beard is grey, have seen the tops and bottoms of things, and know that there are good days as well as bad days. Therefore why should you repine? *Mashallah*, you are young! praise be to Allah, you are a fine youth!—you can ride well; and, although I say it, you are a lord of the sword; therefore, why lose hope? Harken to the words of an old servant. Wind up your spirits, set your brain in good order, and collect your energies. Let us go, and God go with us. *Inshallah*, our destinies will take a good turn. We will burn the father of the first enemy we meet, and drink his blood;—what do you want more?"

"This language cheered me, and I arose from my grief with the intention of returning to our house at Asterabad, and resuming the friendship which we had formed among the Turcomans. I succeeded in making my way home, living upon the country as I and my companions travelled onwards. Afterwards, for several successive years I joined myself occasionally to *chappows* made by the Turcomans, and little by little acquired the character of a *Sahib Shemshir*, a man of the sword, together with the confidence of a large band of adventurers. I never heard from my brother except by uncertain reports, but I knew that he was still detained by Kerîm Khan, and once I was assured by a Mollah who came to Asterabad, that he was considerably esteemed at that chieftain's court, and by his wisdom and ability had succeeded in securing his confidence and good will.

"During these days of my vagabond life I married your

mother. My Amima was the most lovely maiden among the Turcomans, fair as a houri, excellent as an angel, and rumoured as the greatest beauty of the plains of Kipchak. Her father was the most powerful white beard of the Turcoman Obahs, rich in sheep and mares, and whose opinion was courted far and wide. As soon as I became his son-in-law, I found myself at once raised to power, for, what with my family in Asterabad, and what with my connection with the Turcomans, so many were those who courted me and flocked to my gate, that I willingly gave ear to the flattering assurances which they constantly poured into my ears, that I alone was worthy of being the sovereign of Persia. Who is there, my Amima ! among God's creatures, who once in his life at least does not eat dirt ? This was my destiny, and my turn was come for eating it. My flatterers mixed up a bowl of vanity, which I drank off, and as its intoxicating contents passed over the palate of exultation, they swelled my heart with arrogance, and my bowels with ambition. In short, I made the *ada ul sultanet*,—I became a pretender to the throne. I found myself surrounded with a host of needy, though hardy soldiers, accustomed to the warfare of marauders, skilled in attack and cunning in retreat ; and as I promised largely, the body which at first collected was soon increased to a very imposing force ; more horses neighing in the tethers, and more pots boiling on my hearth, than had been known since the days of Nadir the conqueror.

After having subjected much of Mazanderan, I crossed the mountains and laid Khorassan under contribution. I took possession of Meshed, and there I first assumed the airs of a king. I mounted a *jika*, I wore *bazubands*, I ascended a *musnud*, and every day I had a *selām*, men bowing before me, and telling me that I was God's shadow upon earth. Young as I was, full of self-importance, elated by the success which attended me, I projected an extension of my dominions and determined to march upon Ispahan.

"In the meanwhile, the reports of my success had spread far and wide throughout Persia, and called the attention of the Vekil to my undertakings. I soon heard that I was about to be vigorously opposed, and that an

army from Shiraz was marching upon me. I and my followers were full of security in our success. We despised the southern Persians, womanlike-men, as we called them; and in opposition to their effeminacy, claimed for ourselves the title of *Kizzilbashes*,—descendants of Nadir,—the lion-eaters of the North.

“At length, after much expectation, one morning, not far from Mürchekhord, the site of a famous battle, we saw a large body of cavalry, which we recognized to be men of Fars, Arabs, and Balouchistanis. A halt was made on both sides; both parties looked at each other like wrestlers watching where to plant the first blow, or, like lions lashing themselves up to combat. After some delay, all at once I perceived a single horseman dash forward from the condensed mass; and furiously urging his horse towards us, advanced with increasing speed. As he approached, it appeared as if his person was not new to me. I ordered one of my Gholams to meet him. He did not heed him, but passed on contemptuously. As he still came nearer I exclaimed ‘Who is that? In the name of Allah! can it be?’ Before I could exclaim another word I found myself in the arms of my brother!

“A horse-covering was soon spread for us on the ground, and there, in the face of our united forces, we related our respective histories. My brother informed me that he had managed to secure the entire confidence of Kerîm Khan, and that for a long while he had ruled him almost entirely; that the enterprise in which he was now engaged had long been a concerted plan; that the Khan had, of his own accord, proposed that my brother should head the troops which he now sent against me: in short, he informed me, that hearing of my success he was now come to join me, and he did not despair, with the accession of force which he had brought (for he had succeeded in bringing the troops over to himself,) that we might make head against the power of Kerîm Khan, and secure to ourselves the kingdom.

“As you may suppose, I was delighted with this most unlooked-for piece of good fortune, and willingly agreed to every scheme which my brother suggested. In my joy at seeing him, and in the enthusiasm of the moment,

I even offered to resign to him, as my elder brother, the crown which I had placed upon my own head. He said nothing at the moment, either in the affirmative or the negative, but orders were immediately given for taking possession of Ispahan, which we entered together in all the power and state of royalty.

"My brother insisted upon my sending for my wife and family, in order that he might see them, and enjoy the pleasure of knowing those so near and dear to him, long as he had been deprived of the consolation of relationship. They came. You then, my Amima, were a blooming child, and your brother Fattéh Ali a noble boy, beautiful as a rose. Your uncle then first gave him the endearing name of Baba Khan, which I suppose he keeps to this day—and treated you both with all the kindness which his wayward nature would permit. For some time I continued to appear the ostensible monarch, although in the eyes of the people we shared the honours of that station.

"But now comes the afflicting portion of my story. It is evident that two suns cannot shine in one hemisphere, as well as that two kings cannot sit upon one throne. Jealousies arose between us; my brother had early set every instrument to work to secure to himself the majority of voices in his favour, and I soon began to feel the effects of his intrigues. At length things between us came to such a pass that I determined, upon pretext of quelling certain rebels in Khorassan, to separate from him; and accordingly gathered all my own followers about me, previously to my departure. On the very night of our separation,—would you believe it, my Amima?—that brother for whom I had done so much, whom in my heart I loved, and who pretended to return my affection, sent a gang of ruffians, who seized me, threw me down, and with the most unfeeling cruelty, deprived me of my eyes; and that in a manner the most monstrous, digging them from their sockets with the points of their daggers. Ah, I shall never forget both the horrors of mind and body which I then experienced!—and to crown all, my brother, with the perfection of hypocrisy, came to me, crying and bemoaning my misfortune,

upbraiding the wretches who had performed the deed, as if they had acted of their own accord, and threatening to sacrifice them to his vengeance.

"In time I recovered; but my brother's cruelty killed your poor mother. Ah, my child! how shall I ever make you feel the horrors of my situation? I still cherished life, supported by my love for you and your brother; but oftentimes would I call upon death as my only refuge. The love which the people in general bore me was great, and many of my followers still adhered to my fortunes with constancy. This became a crime in the eyes of the new king; and it was plain, that having gone the length he had done, he determined to play the whole game. Cruelty and despotism became now the foundation of his character—no law human or divine could stop him, when ambition or passion prompted him on. He made a charge of conspiracy against me, and determined to rid himself entirely of one who by his existence alone constantly upbraided him with his crimes. Sadek, a Georgian slave, who had stuck to my brother as the eldest, was the person in whom he placed the most confidence, and to him he determined to entrust the perpetration of this horrible deed. When he received the order to put me to death, this faithful man, who was as much attached to me as to my brother, pretended to accede to it, but he laid his plans accordingly to save my life. On the night when the order was to be executed, he managed to secrete me with so much skill, that he made my brother believe his orders had been obeyed; and some time after, having purposely secured to himself the possession of a wretched village in this neighbourhood, he conveyed me hither; and here have I passed my life unknown, and, thank God! forgotten."

The old man finished speaking; a long and affecting silence ensued, during which Amima pondered over such parts of the narrative as related to herself, and came to the conclusion that it must have been Sadek who had saved her life, and brought her to her father. She saw that patience and resignation to her present fate were her only alternatives; and she determined from that moment to bid adieu to the world, to devote herself to

her father, and to pass her time in imploring strength of mind from Heaven to meet whatever events might be reserved for her during the remainder of her days.

CHAPTER VIII.

Magpies in sunshine, and courtiers in a king's ante-room.

PERSIAN SIMILE.

THE violence of feeling which had urged the Shah to the destruction of his niece, was succeeded by acts of unprecedented barbarity, as if he were anxious to stifle the feelings of remorse which the one had raised in his heart, by others still more atrocious. In losing Amima he had lost the only tie in which the affections of his heart were engaged; having once surmounted this, he overthrew every barrier, and like a wild beast breaking from his confinement, spread terror and alarm wherever his steps carried him. The first ravings of his fury turned towards the Khajeh Bashi. After this vile wretch had performed his hated office on the night of the poor maiden's expulsion from the harem, the Shah ordered him to account for his conduct in having allowed the entrance of Zohrab within the sacred precincts of his trust, a task which he performed in so lame a manner, that he very soon after paid the forfeit of his negligence. This led to a total dissolution of the harem itself; for when it was known within the walls that their mistress and princess was no more, the lamentations which were uttered by the women became so audible, accompanied by curses and execrations upon the author of the deed, that the Shah in his wrath ordered them all to be sent away. Mariam, the unfortunate and heart-broken Mariam, seeing the hopeless state to which she was reduced, and the dangers which she run by remaining at her post, fled and concealed herself in the house of an obscure relation in one of the neighbouring villages. Of the other women, some were sent as *presents* to the chief officers about the court, others were

treated with violence, and barbarously put to death, and the old ones turned out to die and to starve.

The public attention during these horrors was much diverted by the vigorous preparations which were making for an invasion of Mazanderan, and for the siege of Astarabad. As much as the cruelty and tyranny of the Shah were conspicuous in matters where his passions were roused, so did he shine where intelligence and activity were required. It was in the field, in the dangers of warfare, and in the conduct of a campaign, that his good qualities were brought into action. Vigilant in the extreme, his prudence and foresight were unabated; his sagacious mind could seize at once upon the whole bearings of a question, and when once he had made up his mind how to act, to that point he applied his extraordinary energies. He had been so worked upon by the mortification of having been outwitted, and by disappointment at the destruction of his plan of policy in what related to the administration of the Caspian provinces of his empire, that he was determined fully to restore himself in his own eyes, as well as in those of the public, to the situation which he conceived he had lost. His revenge impelled him on the one hand, his ambition on the other; he determined that nothing short of the total and entire destruction of Zaul Khan, his son, and his whole family, should make him desist from his enterprise; whilst he expected, as his reward, to enter into full possession of those countries and the city which were now opposed to him, as well as to become the lord paramount of the numerous tribes of Turcomans who inhabited the great plains of Kipchak.

In Persia a bastinado is not a disgrace; a prime vizir and a secretary of state may incur it, and return with all possible dignity to their posts. It was so with the general commanding the king's guards, bearing the title of Serdar, and the executioner in chief. The former was destined to be one of the principal officers in this expedition; he was much esteemed by the Shah for his bravery and activity, had served in all his wars, and had been instrumental, by his zeal and fidelity, in securing to his master many of the conquests which he had achieved. The other was also esteemed a most efficient officer in

war, and particularly in predatory expeditions; for, although proverbially a coward, yet he was so full of resource, so ingenious in laying a country under contribution during the passage of the army, feeding them and enriching himself, that the Shah could not proceed without his services. The other officers to be employed, were Ismael Khan, a Georgian, the chief of the gholams; Mohammed Hussein Khan, *zamburekchi bashi*, the commander of the camel artillery; Asker Khan, *topchi bashi*, in command of the artillery; besides many others, among whom we must not forget our friend Shir Khan Beg, who, although only a gholam shahi, yet was esteemed one of superior pretensions to the rest of that body, and was selected on this occasion, as likely to be of great use to the army from his knowledge, real or presumed, of the country and city about to be invaded.

It was the custom for most of these personages, previous to the great *selam* of the day, to meet in the small room of the chief executioner, situated immediately opposite the principal gate of the Ark. On this occasion, when the expedition to Asterabad was declared, and the chiefs who were to be employed had received the notification of their appointment, those we have already mentioned were present, and were soon in anxious discussion as to the nature of the expedition, and the probability of its results.

"The king has done well, *mashallah*!" exclaimed the chief executioner; "these dogs' sons of Asterabadis would have thought themselves something if we did not go to burn their fathers. It is long since I have smelt gunpowder."

"Yes," said the *Serdar*, "in truth he has done well; however, the undertaking will not be so easy as we imagine. In the jungles of Mazanderan we must put our trust in God! and those dogs of Turcomans are such devils, that they take a man's head off before he can say, *ya Hussein*!"

"Let them go to Jehanum," said the boaster; "what is jungle? what are Turcomans? the first, trees and bushes; the second, men like ourselves. What is all that to the king in person? The Shah! the Shah, after all! *His strength, his thought, his cruelty, his courage; what*

are all the Asterabadis, your Zauls, your Zohrabs, and your cows of Turcomans, when opposed to him? They will be like flies before the sweeping of the storm."

"Zaul Khan, however much of a dog he may be, and however we may despise him," said the Serdar, "has lately afforded us such a specimen of what he can do, that we may be certain it will not be so easy a task as we imagine to take his city. Is it not so?" said the Serdar, addressing himself to Shir Khan Beg. "You were there lately, and know what sort of place it is."

"*Arz mi kunum!* I will beg leave to explain," said the Beg, setting himself well upon his perpendicular, in order to exhibit the tapering form of his waist; "I was there some time, and, praise be to God! as I do not walk about with my eyes shut, and, as in truth the Shah does not make use of fools for his servants, I saw many things. I saw their castle, I saw their towers, their ditch, and their drawbridge. I saw themselves, may their livers descend! and their guns, and their muskets, and every thing that they have—*Bah, bah, bah!*" said he, exulting, "I have seen many things."

"Well," said the Serdar, "there is no harm in that; but give me an answer—what sort of a place is Astera-bad? Since you have seen, you can explain."

"It is not at all a bad place," said the gholam; "by your head, and by the salt of the Shah, it is no bad place! their walls are strong; they keep such a good look out from their turret tops, that, may their fathers be burnt! I, even I could not approach without their asking me why I came, and whence I came; but I gave them their answer; they won't forget the gholam shahi for many a long year."

"Is it not a lie," said the chief executioner, in an inquiring though anxious tone, "that a man with a gun sits day and night behind every tree, and kills every man he sees without knowing how to miss?"

"What words are these?" said the Beg, happy to have an opportunity to tease the man of blows; "behind every tree? rather say, behind every leaf. The woods are there as thick as the wool on your cap. You can neither see the earth nor the sky for them; it is utter darkness; one gropes about. If I had not had the eyes of a lynx—~~mine~~

are peculiar eyes—not like other men's eyes—I can see where a cat cannot. If I had not had these eyes, where should I have been? where would have been the Shah's business? but, *mashallah*! I saw through them all; if you want eyes look at mine."

"But you escaped," said the chief executioner, "notwithstanding these concealed men?"

"Leave me alone for escaping," said the Beg, "'twas these very eyes that were of use. You, Khan, would not escape—by your soul, you would not. With my eyes about me, whose dog is he who would venture to take Shir Khan?"

Ismael Khan, the Georgian, a man of an uncommonly fine person, who commanded the whole of the gholams, a body not equalled in Asia, either for the men of which it was composed, or the horses which they bestrode, smiled at the vapouring of the Beg, as well as the fear which his words produced in the chief executioner, and emitting one long thin vapour of smoke into the apartment, which he had just drawn from his gold enamelled kalioun, said—"mashallah, Shir Khan Beg, you have seen and done wonderful things in Mazanderan during your short stay in it. We must send you ahead of the army with some of our picked gholams."

"Yes, yes," said the chief executioner, "and drive all those men without saints from behind the trees. Give me the open plain, with a spear in my hand, and a good Turcomani horse under me, and then, let what will happen, I am there."

"Upon my eyes be it," said the Beg, very unconcernedly twisting the ringlets behind his ears, "I am ready. But cavalry is no use in that unblessed country. However good a rider a man may be, and in truth I am not an indifferent one, cavalry is useless. My horsemanship is celebrated; I have ridden the father and grandfather of every horse, from the plains of Nejd to those bred in the mountains of Circassia—what more do you want? I am one of those who can ride quite differently from other men. I—"

"In truth, Shir Khan Beg is a good rider," said Ismael Khan; "but say, is not Zaul Khan, and Mustapha his brother, and the Turcoman deputies, are not they

better? Whatever the mehmandar tried to do, they did better."

Upon this there was a laugh all round, sorely at the expense of the conceited Beg, who, however, being rather accustomed to this species of raillery, calmly adjusted his beard, gave a rub upwards to his eyebrows, and called for his kaliouna.

Resuming the conversation, the Serdar said—"But if cavalry will not do, we must throw our *Tuffenkchis*, our musketeers, in advance, and destroy every lurking ambush that may be in wait for us."

"You say well," exclaimed the chief executioner, as if he were delighted with this thought; "first let the woods be cleared by the musketeers, and then we on horseback will follow sword in hand. Praise be to God, you said well."

The Zamburekchi bashi was a short crabbed looking old man; his head large, his back rather inclined to hump, and like one of the camels upon which his small iron guns were mounted, sat for a long time in utter repose, quietly chewing the cud of such reflections as might chance to pass through his brain. At length he said—"After all a *zamburek* is something. It has burnt the fathers of the Muscovites, why should it not those of the Asterabadis and the Turcomans? Let the Shah only give me an order to take my camels, my gunners, and my fire amongst them, and, jungle or no jungle, I will drive all life out of their heads."

"Man!" said the Serdar, "who ever heard of a *zamburek* in Mazanderan! you might as well talk of devils in paradise. In the first place, your camels could not make five steps without falling, so slippery and mountainous is the soil, and lucky would you think yourself if they did not all split up in twain, like a criminal who has undergone the *shekkeh*."*

"My camels are not made for splitting up," said the old general of camel artillery, with some warmth, "my camels are made for fighting. Did they not scare the

* The *shekkeh* is a punishment common in Persia, by which a criminal is tied by the legs to two posts, with his head downwards, and then cut into two equal parts.

Chirkes, the Abkhas, and the Lesgies—not to mention the Russians—out of their wits when the Shah last marched into Georgia. We threw balls at them with such an aim that we made their fathers dance out of their graves, and made all their old women cry *Aman!* and see, has not the Shah allowed me to wear a *jika* on my cap, and a jewelled dagger to my waist, for having hit an ass a parasang off? What words are these, O Serdar! Mohammed Hussein is no such fool either, not to know what he says. Why then shall we not strike these ragged Turcomans, and those less than curs of Asterabadis.”

“Camels are good things, and iron guns are good things too,” said the Serdar, “and *mashallah!* praise be to God, the Shah cannot boast of such another good servant as Mohammed Hussein Khan; but neither his bravery, nor his camels, nor his guns, can make a wet soil dry, nor a mountain a plain, nor can he give hoofs to his camels, or prevent them from splitting when their legs part asunder. Is it not so, Shir Khan Beg; you, who know those countries?”

The Beg, who had puffed away the little check which had been put to his boasting, again called upon to give his opinion, answered the Serdar, although he looked at the Zamburekchi bashi, with a most self-complacent air, saying—“What words are these? What fool is there who does not know that camels split up in Mazanderan? I, even I, man as I am, nearly split up myself as I walked over some of their unsainted hills. But I walk in such a manner, different from any body else, that with God’s help nothing happened to me;—but, oh, help in Allah! you ought to have seen the horses and the mules how they rolled about. There is the famous Sandûk pass, which we must all go through, where as sure as asses are not mules, and mules not horses, every one of your camels must split in two, and unless the halves can get up and walk on by themselves, you must leave your guns on the ground, and say *Allah akbar*, God is great! *wallah, billah!* By Allah, I say true—if I tell a lie, cut off my head for my pains.”

“And so,” said the Zamburekchi bashi, anger rising into his face, “by your account, the Shah must be an ass, *his grand vizir* must be an ass, and Mohammed Hussein

Khan must be an ass, whilst Shir Khan Beg, *mashallah*, alone must be the lord of wit and the lord of knowledge. Go, go; I spit upon such wit and such knowledge."

The old man, whose chief associates were his camels and their drivers and his gunners, was expected when he spoke to be coarse, therefore his speeches never gave the offence they would have done had they come from the mouth of a more refined person; but, as nothing could convince him that camels did split in Mazanderan, his companions for the present left him to his obstinacy.

"The Khan speaks well," said the chief executioner. "The Shah, who has made war in every region in the world, who was bred and born in Mazanderan, who knows what zambureks are as well as a mollah knows his *fathek*, and who has seen more camels than our astronomer stars,—the Shah—may the blessed Prophet take him into his holy keeping!—the Shah, I say, has ordered the zambureks to be in readiness. Why throw more words into the air? Whose dogs are we to say 'nay' when he says 'yea'?—besides, hear my words—if a camel splits, does it follow that it becomes dust? No; it immediately becomes food; it becomes *kabob*, roast meat, and so much is saved to the public treasury."

"Well have you said," remarked Asker Khan, the commander of the field artillery, a renegade Frank, who had once been a Cuba pirate, afterwards a doctor in the service of an Indian nabob, then captain of an Arabian ship, and lastly general of artillery to the Shah. "Camel beef is no bad thing when you can get none other. I myself have eaten, in the new world, lion steaks done on a fire of flowing lava, and seasoned with gunpowder!"

"Indeed!" said all the assembled guests, who, like their countrymen, were always ready to believe any story, however monstrous, about the new world. "*Wallah!* by Allah! are there lions in the new world?" inquired one. "Does fire, then, always come from the earth?" said another. "Is all the roast meat in the new world made of lion's flesh?" said a third.

"It's all made of lion's flesh," said Asker Khan, "when it's not made of alligator;" speaking in a language which

was meant to pass for Persian, but which was a farago of English, Persian, Arabic, and Hindoostani words, and so far comprehensible that his auditors interpreted it each after his own fashion. The extraordinary accounts which this personage gave of himself even exceeded the habitual exaggeration of the Persians, but his prowess was so great that he made his words respected and even believed, whilst his knowledge of gunnery, which amounted to little more than to point a carronade from the quarter deck, made him pass for a miracle of science.

"Is it true," said the chief executioner, "that in the new world Jews have tails?"

"I never saw them," said the Frank Khan, "but I believe it; because I know that in a country called Guatimalo, there is a set of men who wear large bags behind, which serve them for pockets."

"Ah!" said the Serdar, not in the least disbelieving the fact, "like the animal which was once brought to Shah Seffi, having a pouch in front where it carried its young."

"Just so," cried the general of camel artillery, "that must be true, for our camels wear inside pockets, where they carry food and water for a week:—it is plain that animals have their inside as well as their outside pockets."

"Wonderful are the works of Allah!" exclaimed the Serdar.

"What are these things to what I have seen!" said Shir Khan Beg, as if he were oppressed by the invention of some great lie of which he seemed anxious to be delivered; "I have seen the hole in Mazanderan in which Rustam thrust the Dive Sefid after he had almost killed him, and then stifled him by throwing in a whole army, men and horse, which he first slew and then threw upon him. Talking of pockets, nothing was ever like this hole. When I see a thing, it is not like things which other men see. My things are worth seeing."

The renegade, who, although he had long known and been accustomed to the vapourings of the conceited Beg, could never refrain from disconcerting him whenever he was able; but on this occasion, being anxious to acquire some information upon the sort of country through which *he would have to drag his train of artillery*, said—"I fear,

Sir Beg, that if there be such large holes in that country, we shall have some difficulty in taking our guns across it."

"What guns! what artillery!" said Shir Khan. "It will be well if we can take ourselves through the country. There is not a road large enough for a cat throughout the whole of Mazanderan; how then can you drag a gun? There is one mountain down which your guns would go well enough, by placing them at the top and letting them run to the bottom! But that is my way—I always have a way different from other men's ways. Other men would have a hundred peasants to drag the guns, besides oxen and horses. Now letting them run alone is my way."

"Tis true," said the chief executioner, who acted as a sort of commissary for the army, "that the passage of artillery through Persia is attended with many inconveniences; sometimes the guns come to a full stop for several days; for where the inhabitants of a village hear that artillery is likely to pass through their district, they take to the mountains, abandoning their houses, and do not return till it has passed, lest they should be seized to drag it forward. If the road were all down hill, then the Beg's plan would not be a bad one; but the gun can't run up hill, nor along the plains, without the help of peasants."

"The report spread abroad among the enemy that artillery accompanies the Shah," said the Serdar, "is frequently sufficient of itself to quell a rebellion, and to bring the disaffected to the Shah's stirrup. For that reason we must take our guns with us, and Asker Khan will get every help he requires. In your country, Sir Khan," said he to the commander of artillery, "how many peasants do you generally harness to a gun?"

"Allah, Allah!" cried the renegade; "my country is full of strange men and stranger customs. Peasants harnessed, indeed! they would pull the king's palace about his ears if he ventured to order them to do what they did not like."

"Then your kings must be sorry folk indeed," exclaimed the Zamburekchi bashi. "Look at ours—there's a true Shah—*bah! bah! bah!*—none ever cut off men's heads like him."

"Nor beat men on the feet like him," said Asker Khan, significantly looking at the three present, who had recently undergone that infliction.

"That is a stroke of *takdeer*, destiny," said the chief executioner, "which must happen every where. I dare say that your vizirs, and your secretaries of state, and your chief executioners, are persecuted by *takdeer* as much as ours, get as many bastinadoes, eat as much occasional dirt, and rub their foreheads on the royal threshold as well as we. Bastinado here is nothing. I have eaten my blows, and I only get up and say, 'May your shadow never be less.' What more do you want?"

In this manner did they converse, discussing every thing that came before them with the greatest freedom. In a country like Persia, where lying is not esteemed a vice, the man whose abuse of the king may be repeated, and reach the sovereign's ear, has always the resource of denying his own words, and from long experience, finding that one man's word is as little worth as that of another, the king himself finishes by never believing either side of the question. Aga Mohamed in this respect was as liberal as a person in his situation could be, he seldom vexed his subjects for their opinions—all he required was unbounded submission. He rarely lent his ear to reports of things said of him, of scandal, or of malignant hints—such men he always reproved and even punished; therefore it was not easy to govern him except by facts, and although his nature was suspicious, yet that suspicion was only to be roused by his own observation. He had learned by long experience how totally his own countrymen were to be disbelieved in all they said. He found the simplest mode of equalizing justice, in cases of complaints and quarrels amongst his officers and ministers, was to inflict punishment on both parties, a system which tended to diminish his own annoyance, although it increased the national duplicity.

The above recited conversation was in its fullest vigour, when the announcement of the Shah's being about to take his seat on the throne at the selam, was heard in all parts of the Ark, and the parties assembled immediately broke up in haste to appear in their respective places before their sovereign. It was always an awful moment; for his

the presence of the tyrant, who could say that his turn for destruction might not be the next upon the book of fate ?

As soon as the king was seated, he took this opportunity of addressing himself long and loudly to his prime vizir, Mirza Hajji Ibrahim, in order thereby to show the world that in the recent deadly events, he had arisen blameless, and that the confidence reposed in him had not in the slightest degree diminished.

The Shah now openly talked of his views upon Astarabad, and himself investigated, with the most scrupulous detail, every thing that related to the arrangement of the expedition. He inspected arms, gave his opinion upon clothing, and horses, and equipages ; issued directions for provisions, and for the establishment of the *Ordou Bazar*, or camp market. He talked to Ismael Khan upon the equipment of his gholams, to the Serdar concerning his corps of musketeers, to the renegade of guns, and to the general of camel artillery touching his *zambureks*. His sagacity awed almost as much as his cruelty. Every one felt that, under the scrutiny of such an eye and such a mind, to do one's duty was inevitable, and therefore none flinched, but went heartily to work in its accomplishment. At the breaking up of the *selam*, the whole town soon rang with the activity, the excitement, and the anxieties of war, and in the general din was forgotten the individual misery produced by the late events. There was one order above all others which produced a great sensation, namely, that no woman upon pain of death should be admitted to join the camp. This injunction set loose every female tongue, from the lowest drudge in the harem to the khanum on her musnud, and the Shah, his cruelties, and the murder of his niece, were subjects which occupied every mind, as they excited every execration. Although the inhabitants of the *anderoon* were in general pleased to be left behind, yet the fact of there being a prohibition, sufficed to set every woman in opposition thereto. Never was the perversity of nature's fairer half so self-evident as upon the proclamation of this order.

CHAPTER IX.

It would be easier to change the *Kebek* than the resolves of a wilful woman.

THE HAREM.

WE must now return to Zulma, who, by the escape of Zohrab and its consequent events had been kept in a constant state of deadly apprehension, lest, owing to the part which she unwittingly had taken in it, she might have been added to one of the many sacrificed on this occasion. She felt that she owed her safety principally to the ingenuity of the humpback, who being himself deeply implicated in all her intrigues, had left nothing undone which falsehood and ability might compass, to keep himself clear of danger—and he had succeeded. The Shah continued to confide in him, and so useful and necessary had he rendered himself to the tyrant, that even where suspicion fell upon him, it did little more than glance, such would have been the inconvenience of finding him guilty.

The bastinado which had been inflicted upon the chief executioner, was scarcely felt as a family misfortune; for so common were punishments of all descriptions during the reign of the present sovereign, that scarcely a house was there in the city which did not occasionally hear within its walls the moanings of bodily pain, or lamentations for the death of a relative; nor had even Zulma found relief from the supposed death of her rival; for, lost as Zohrab was to them both, she now deplored, in common with the rest of the people, the destruction of one who was ever the refuge of the miserable, and a barrier to the overwhelming despotism which now oppressed them. It was only when she heard the Shah's order promulgated—his positive order that no woman should be allowed to follow the camp, that all the perverseness of her sex was revealed, and she determined, happen what would, to disobey it and go. Her love for Zohrab was roused;—she anticipated the moment when she might be of use and comfort to him, should he be unfortunate enough to fall into the Shah's hand—perhaps even save his life—and now that her rival was no more, she felt confident that his

heart would no longer turn from her. Then feelings of ambition dawned in her mind: "Who knows," thought she, "what influence such a woman as I may not acquire over the king! Wretch, and much to be pitied as he is, habit is every thing, and he will feel the necessity of a female confidant. Why should Zulma not take the place of Amima!"

Awakened and fired by these thoughts, she could not rest until she had communicated them to her chief adviser the humpback, whom, notwithstanding in the main she despised, yet was he so useful to her, that she could take no step without his advice. He exercised as much sway over her father as he did over the Shah himself: and although Zulma scarcely wanted his assistance in the first instance, inasmuch as she acted entirely without control in the paternal mansion, still his word was always certain to produce its due effect upon occasions of emergency; besides he always brought with him that look of mystery, which induced whisperings and gadding in corners, so dear to women in general, and particularly so congenial to the atmosphere of a chief executioner's house.

"And so," she said, as soon as he appeared, "women are prohibited from going with the army?"

"They are, my soul," said the crafty deformity with his usual smile; "not one is to go. The Shah gave the order this day at the selam; not one goes."

"So be it," said Zulma, with a forced expression of resignation on her face: "So be it—the Shah is free to do whatever he pleases in his own dominions, with either his male or female subjects; but withal this, he eats dirt, and—I go."—

"You! How, and by what means? Heaven forbid!"

"I go, happen what will," she repeated; "upon that make your mind easy."

"It cannot be," said the humpback, "you know the Shah is not to be trifled with, and particularly in his present mood. As there is but one Allah, I approach his head with a caution and a silence which makes my blood run cold when I think of it, and when I do handle it, it is with the same fear that a man touches a bomb-shell, lest it should go off and blow him to ten thousand atoms. Once I thought you the mistress of wisdom, the owner of

penetration, now you will make me suppose you a candidate for madness."

"What words are these," exclaimed the maiden, "you yourself must be mad, not to see that what I propose is nothing less than wisdom. Is Zulma to be lost for ever?—immured within the walls of a hated anderoon, with nothing to do but to puff the smoke of her kalioun from her mouth, chasing it with her eye until it be lost in air?—to talk with none but gossiping dames and idle girls, and have no higher ambition in life than to see that her father's ferashes perform their duty? Do not you perceive that there is a Shah to be won, and an empire to be governed? That he who has lost one tie in life, as necessary to him as the air he breathes, will require another; and that a princess's place is vacant, surrounded though it be by danger? Go to, thou art the candidate for madness, if thy eyes cannot see these things!"

The humpback, to whose understanding such flights of imaginative eminence had not yet reached, opened all his eyes as he heard the words of his companion pour from her mouth; and new schemes of ambition very soon formed themselves in his mind. He immediately felt that, Amima being no more, the reign of his rival Sadek in the Shah's good graces might easily be brought to a close, and should it ever happen that Zulma became a royal banou, he would stand a good chance of leaving his razor to wield the pen. The head which was now employed in small intrigues, he soothed himself by hoping might ere long be engaged in conducting affairs of state.

But the more he pondered on these things, the more he foresaw how difficult it would be to put Zulma's scheme into execution of accompanying the camp; and he loudly disclaimed any intention on his part of proposing it to his royal master.

"Allah, Allah!" he cried out, "to ask such a favour of the Shah is in other words to ask for the bastinado; I am not the man to undertake any thing so dangerous. Besides, you are not my daughter, 'tis your father's duty to ask: persuade him to make the supplication."

"No wheat will spring up unless the soil be well sunned," said Zulma; "what good was ever gained without some risk? But you say right, it is not your business; it

shall be my father's, unless he too fears a second bastinado ; let us send for him." Upon which she ordered one of the slaves in the court-yard to seek her father, and require his presence, a practice which, although against every rule of respect and decorum between a child and its parent, she never hesitated to adopt.

He came at her bidding, and no sooner was he arrived, than having recourse to her most coaxing arts, and throwing all the persuasion she was able into the tone of her voice, she explained the reasons why she wished to accompany the camp, asserting that it was solely to watch over his safety, and finished by entreating him to secure the Shah's permission to that effect.

"Are you mad," said he, "or do you wish to kill your father? Have I not already eaten more stick than falls to one man's share, and do you require me to undergo the punishment again merely to advance your whim?"

"*Astafarallah*, heaven forbid!" she exclaimed, "but the king surely can never be angry because his subjects claim the privilege of being of use. Only ask, and should he refuse there is no harm done."

"Only take the lion by the tooth, and if he does not bite, there is no harm done, you might as well say. Allah, Allah!" exclaimed the ruffled chief executioner, at the request made him by his daughter.

"Grant but this to your daughter," said she, "and I ask no more. The Goozoo says that there can be no harm in going before the Shah upon this errand, therefore why should you hesitate?"

"Does he say so, indeed?" said her father.

"Your slave said," replied the humpback, "that it would be well if the lady Zulma were to go. We want all the wise heads in the country to oppose those *shaitans* of Asterabadis."

"There," said the animated maiden raising her voice, "did I not say so! Now go, if you do not wish to see your daughter dead before you, go!"

"Tis well in the Goozoo to say this," said the unwilling father, "he has not eaten stick."

"That time has gone by," said the humpback; "the king has had enough of punishment for some while; he has taken to moderation, and he smokes the kalium of quiet. *There is no harm in him now.*"

After much additional persuasion, in which the daughter made use of all her entreaties, and the humpback his craft, the weak man consented to go, and with unwilling steps bent his way towards the palace. When he got there he found that the Shah had been for some time in *khehoet*, his closet, in close conference with his Prime Vizir. He therefore determined to wait without until the Vizir should be dismissed, his heart misgiving him all the while, and his tongue seeking with fear and trembling for the words with which he should bring forward his request.

We must there leave him, in order to inform our readers of what took place at this conference, in which many schemes of public policy were discussing.

The Shah, after the fatal catastrophe which had taken place in his house, by which we mean the destruction of his niece, became anxious, whenever it reached the ears of her brother, Fattah Ali Mirza, the then Governor of Fars, that it should not affect his loyalty. He heard that no prince had ever rendered himself so popular to the Shirazis, since the days of Kerim Khan, and he was fearful lest, in the excitement of his rage upon hearing the death of his beloved sister, he might throw himself into open rebellion. Upon this, the first order which the Shah issued to the Grand Vizir at this conference, without giving any reason for so doing, was the recall of the Prince Fattah Ali from his government.

"Hajji," said the Shah, "let a *rakm* to our nephew at Shiraz be immediately despatched; the courier must use all speed; on his head be it! Let our orders be implicit and peremptory that the Prince, upon the receipt of it, instantly leaves Shiraz, and *chappari*, with the haste of a courier, join our royal stirrup in Mazanderan."

The Vizir knew too well the temper of his master, when he issued such an order, to reply any words but "*Be cheshm*, upon my eyes be it!" He would have made a remonstrance had he seen it fitting, for the Prince was one of his greatest favourites. In the conduct which he had held during his government of the city and province entrusted to his care, he had shown the greatest wisdom and moderation. Every report which he received from the South, spoke of the prosperity, the quiet, the improving wealth and population of Fars and the adjacent

country ; and greatly did he fear, lest in robbing the state of so good a servant as the young prince, the usual consequences of the rapine and exactions of inferior officers would destroy all the good that had been effected. However, in this instance he was obliged to obey, and instantly seating himself before the Shah, with his own hand he wrote the order, applied the royal seal, and despatched it with the necessary injunctions to the courier to use all speed.

The Shah then led to the discussion of the affairs of Asterabad.

"It is evident," said he, "that Zaul Khan is a person not to be despised. We have seen the extraordinary ingenuity which he displayed in withdrawing his son from our power ; we have seen the judicious manner in which he combined the evasion of the deputies with his own escape, and their return, unhurt, and unmolested, to their fastnesses. He has literally taken the cap from off our head ; he is an enemy not to be despised. However the Shah may trust to the bravery of his troops, yet in this expedition bravery goes for less than skill ; and as we know that the greatest skill will be opposed to us, so it behoves us also to exert our utmost ingenuity in foreseeing every thing. The Shah requires the aid of your understanding ; have you made any thought by which he may receive benefit?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the Vizir, "it has struck your slave that we must devise some means of communicating with those of your Majesty's subjects, who do not participate in the rebellious spirit of the governor of Asterabad, and who look to the coming of your victorious troops, as a moment of deliverance from oppression. Such we know there are ; upon one in particular your slave knows dependance is to be placed."

"*Barikallah*, you say well ! praise be to God, your thought is in unison with the Shah's. We know that the Mollahs and the priesthood are with us ; they hate the *sunni* Turcomans, and esteem an alliance with them as unlawful and impure. Firmans must be addressed to them. But who is the one man, whom you say we can depend upon?"

"May I be your sacrifice," answered Hajji Ibrahim,

"it is one Shireen Ali, the Mirza or scribe to Zaul Khan, a Shirazi, a man of considerable talent, a great penman and learned; your slave has known him long, and has ascertained to a certainty, that he goes with us, and that he looks to the coming of your majesty as the Jews do to that of their Prophet. When your majesty's slave, the Gholam Shir Khan Beg was at Asterabad, he saw enough of this man to ascertain that he was ready to do any thing to serve your majesty; he has already frequently received the proper *rishweh*, manure or bribe, and now let us hope to see the fruits of it."

"It will be proper," said the Shah, thoughtfully, "to communicate with this man instantly, and to establish a correspondence with him."

"Perhaps," said the Vizir, "it would be the wish of the asylum of the universe to despatch Shir Khan Beg again, with orders to make his way into Asterabad itself if possible, and there disseminate the proper firmans, by which the well-inclined might ascertain how favourably the Shah is disposed towards them, and thus secure a co-operation against the present governors; and also, he might have a conference with the Mirza, and settle some plan of communication beneficial to your Majesty's arms, and to the ultimate object of the expedition."

"You do not say ill," said the Shah, "let us see this Shir Khan. I know his merits; he is a *foozool* and a coxcomb; but he is active and brave, and no bad youth. Send for him."

As soon as the name of Shir Khan Beg was called upon, among the numerous courtiers and officers who plied at the royal gate, the eyes of all were turned towards him, as one destined to receive a further infliction of punishment. He himself turned pale, and was speechless; he slowly arose, followed the messenger, forgetting even to give his cap a new pinch, or his shawl a more graceful adjustment. When he came to the small low door which led into the *khelwet*, he could scarcely stand, so truly was he terrified (in common let it be said with all the Persians of his day) by merely knowing himself to be near the presence of the Shah. He made his *proper bow*, and left his shoes at the door. As soon as

the Shah perceived him, he said in a milder tone than usual, which gave courage to the faltering man, "*Biah pish*, come forward! upon which he immediately resumed a sufficient portion of his self-assurance to put him in possession of his wits, and approached, standing on the brink of the basin of water, making one of his lowest inclinations, although in so doing he did not forget one of those characteristic vibrations of his hips, which indicated the repossession of his natural assurance.

"You were at Asterabad," said the Shah; "was it not so?"

"As I am your less than the least," said the Beg, "I was."

"What did you hear of the state of public opinion there? How much in favour of the Shah, how much in favour of the rebels?"

"As I am your slave," said the Beg, "quite himself again, your slave saw and heard many things there; your slave said to himself, 'This is the time for prudence; open eyes and ears, but shut the mouth.'"

"Well," said the Shah, "never mind what you said to yourself, what did others say to you?"

"Your slave heard that most of the *Ulemah* looked upon the Turcomans as dirt; and only required the presence of the asylum of the universe to send them and their friends, by the blessing of the prophet, to jehannum! your slave heard this, by the salt of the Shah, he heard this! By the Shah's head, he has a way of hearing things different from other people!"

"Be silent," said the Vizir in a suppressed tone, speak to the purpose, and cease being a *foozool*," an officious prater.

"And who was the man amongst them, most likely to be of use to the Shah's government?" said the king; "such a man you saw?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the Beg, "a bankrupt Mirza was there; a fellow who would have taken any thing, even as low as a cucumber, for a bribe; who said this and that, and that and this; who made promises as thick as the trees in the forest; who swore quicker than any Shirazi ever talked; and told more lies in a minute than your slave could tell *asterferallahs* in an hour.

Your slave, who knows the value of such men better than any one thinks, he might be turned to a good account for the Shah's service."

The Shah's face curled up into a malignant smile at hearing this speech from the Beg, as he glanced his eye at the Prime Vizir, who was himself a Shirazi, and who seemed to wince at this account given after the eulogiums which he himself had made of the individual; but, however, his good temper never forsook him for an instant, and he allowed this little check to his dignity to pass unnoticed.

"Now, Shir Khan," said the Shah, "do you think that firmans might be introduced into Asterabad, announcing protection to the well-affected, and death to those who abetted the rebels?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said the Beg, "*chera*, why not? With wit and activity, every thing can be done."

"Then be you the man to do it. You are a good servant, the Shah knows you, you are a better gholam than a mehmandar; you must forthwith set off, introduce yourself into Asterabad, and do all that you will be instructed to do. You shall have every help from the Shah, and should you perform this service well, the title of Khan awaits you, as also the right to wear a jewelled dagger."

At every word of this speech, the enraptured Beg grew taller and taller; his hips immediately felt the arrogant impulse, like horses on the fret anxious to be off; he could not resist giving a twist to his mustache, and as fast as the Shah lauded, he bowed and bowed; until at length, upon the last promise of the jewelled dagger, he fairly went on his knees and kissed the ground.

"Your slave, who is less than the least," said the Beg, "will lay down his life for the Shah. Whatever happens he goes. If every tree in Mazanderan concealed a Turcoman, and every Turcoman presented a spear, he would fight his way through. Give your slave his instructions, and he will say *be cheshm* unto death. Whose dogs be they, who will dare to say ought to him, when he exhibits the royal rakm!"

In this manner did he go on, until he was almost black in the face with the explosions of flattery and professions of self-devotion that issued from his lips. At length he

was stopped, and having been dismissed with the strictest injunctions of secrecy, he departed with such a feeling of elevation that the clouds of heaven seemed to hang too low for him.

As he appeared again among his friends at the *derakhoneh*, at the royal gate, the swagger of this self-important personage was a thing which the Persians had still to learn. His tightened silk vest actually burst with the swelling of his inward pride. He walked as if 'khan' were written upon every step, and his nether person vibrated so intensely, that he conceived the jewels and the dagger were actually in his girdle. No one could conceive by what rapid operation he had thus been acted upon, for he seemed to have been as quickly inflated by a new infusion of vanity as ever a balloon was by rarefied air.

One of the persons who met tho Beg upon his exit was the chief executioner, who observing the expansion of his looks, and the appearance of joy spread over his whole person, and who had been pondering over the disagreeable task which had been imposed upon him, now took courage, and determined to make his daughter's request known.

"God's pity was upon you!" said the chief executioner. "We thought that the countenance of the Shah was again turned against you, and that there was more work for the *falek*."

"Are men mad," said Shir Khan Beg, "that they cannot see a person go before the Shah, without thinking that he must of necessity be going to receive punishment? Cannot they also sometimes think that he may be going to receive reward?" said he, pressing his shawl down, admiring his waist, and casting a look of delight over his whole person. "The Shah treats me in a peculiar way—he does not treat me like other men. The Shah is one who knows his man—he distinguishes a good servant from a bad one."

"How sits his humour to-day," said the anxious Khan; "can he be spoken to?"

"Some men may speak to him, others not," said the Beg; "it depends upon the person—some are fools, and some are wise. It is now two hours that we have been conversing together; let every man judge for himself."

Upon this he left the chief executioner to speculate upon what might have befallen the Beg, who seemed to look upon all others as less than the dirt of the field, and moreover to settle in his own mind what steps he would pursue in order to put into execution the wishes of his daughter.

When the Shah broke up the conference with his vizir, he issued from his private apartments to transact business at the public selam, and thither the chief executioner awaited him. Occupying his usual post at the ceremonial, he anxiously studied the lines in the Shah's face, in order to discover whether they might be propitious to his undertaking or not, as a pilot will study the rippling on the surface of the water to ascertain whether the current which it denotes will bear him favourably into port. The king, during the ceremony, called aloud to him to inquire who had gone forward to provide provisions for the camp during its stay at Firouzabad, when the Khan, in a fit of absence, only engaged with the one object of his thoughts, answered, "As I am your sacrifice, my daughter," to the utter astonishment of every one present, and still more to the surprise of the king himself, who exclaimed, "O little man, are ye turned mad? Did he say his daughter, or are our senses deranged?"

The wretched executioner, upon being convicted of this mistake, regained his self-possession, for now he lost sight of the object which he had in view, and said, "as I am your sacrifice, your slave has eaten dirt, his ears have been mistaken." He then answered the king's question to his satisfaction, but he left the presence fully resolved not to risk his own safety by asking that for his daughter which he knew would not fail to overwhelm him with confusion.

At the breaking up of the selam, he returned home, but was in no hurry to encounter his impatient and wilful daughter, who, thwarted as she would be in her expectation, he felt would exhibit one of those violent paroxysms of temper so common to her. However, at length he did return, and informed her of his inability to perform her bidding. To his surprise he found her perfectly prepared for a disappointment, and when he had told the whole history of his morning's adventure, she scarcely gave any

signs of being displeased ; but there was a dogged obstinacy in her manner, which showed the woman, and which seemed to say, " stay awhile, and you shall see."

CHAPTER X.

A lame man has not always a lame story.

EASTERN PROVERB.

THE gentle reader may or may not have discovered that the mysterious person who received the wretched Amima at the wicket gate of the Ark, and who deposited her with so much apparent cruelty and such extraordinary haste in the desert, was neither more nor less than Sadek, the Shah's confidential servant. He is a personage of too much consequence in this our narrative not to merit some more particular notice, and we entreat a few moments for the short history of his early and subsequent life.

He was a Georgian by birth. He was bought a slave when quite a child, by the father of the Shah, and had been brought up with him and his brother, acting as their slave, and identified with the family of his master, after the manner of the east. He had more particularly attached himself to the fortunes of the Shah, although in fact he felt himself as much the servant of his brother. He was a man of peculiar character, unrelenting and firm of purpose, but kind and considerate in the main ; possessing, under a stern expression of countenance, a tender and compassionate heart.

When the Shah had put out his brother's eyes, and had ordained his death, it was upon Sadek that he pitched for the perpetration of his horrible mandate, but the faithful and sagacious servant, who well knew the character of his master, whilst he bowed submission to the order, determined in his own mind that it should not be executed. He had secured to himself the lordship of a small and obscure village, situated on the borders of the Great Salt

Desert; and precisely in the same 'manner in which he had preserved the daughter, so he had, some years back, the father, and installed him in the small tenement which we have already described as situated near that village. But with such sagacity and secrecy was this conducted, that none but himself was aware that the order had not been executed; and as he knew that his own life depended upon the secret being preserved, so every plan which he formed was always with the view to keep it from publicity. The miserable peasantry of the village, ignorant and barbarous as they were, knew that such a being existed, but who or what he was no one cared to inquire, and thus year succeeded year, leaving Hussein Kûli Khan in security and oblivion, cheering Sadek in the success of his scheme, and in the comfortable satisfaction of having saved the life of one to whom he was attached by so many ties.

As soon as the Shah informed him of his determination to put his niece to death, and that he had selected him to do the deed, Sadek's mind was immediately made up to save the daughter as he had the father. He had been ordered to make away with her unknown to any one, but he was obliged to make an accomplice of the Khajeh bashi, in order to draw her from the anderoon without exciting suspicion. He selected two of the Shah's fleetest horses, from among those kept in training to be used on emergencies, and disguised as he was, performed the rapid journey in the manner we have already described. It being a matter of life and death, he could do no otherwise than steel his heart and shut his ears to the temporary pain which he knew must be inflicted upon his unfortunate charge, feeling that the quiet which would follow would soon restore her strength; and as it was necessary for him to re-appear before the Shah on the very next morning within a reasonable time, it became urgent to lose not a moment's time in depositing the maiden where he did, a feat of rapidity which none but horses such as they bestrode could have performed. In fact, he appeared before his master as usual, almost at the same hour in the morning at which he was accustomed to awake him; and in so doing he said not a word, but put on his accustomed unmoved and stern aspect. The Shah did not ven-

ture to ask a single question, trusting in the fidelity of his servant, and he remained satisfied, by the inflexible bearing of the man, that his orders had been but too faithfully executed. And thus for the moment ended the horrid tragedy.

In the state of things that followed he was more than ever interested that nothing should compromise his secrecy, and this circumstance made him more stern and silent than before. He was persecuted by his sister Mariam, who, in deploring her own miseries, was always most inquisitive about the fate of her mistress, and sometimes committed herself by acts of such imprudence, that she formed the torment of his existence. She was constantly expressing her desire to proceed to Asterabad, to gain an asylum in the family of Zohrab, where she was certain of a welcome, and although Sadek saw that this scheme was in every way objectionable, yet rather than continue open to her indiscretions he at length ceded, and assured her that he would soon form some scheme for conducting her there in safety. The widow of the late chief huntsman, during the late events, had taken refuge in her old dwelling at Firouzabad, together with her son, the attached servant of Zohrab, who thus had escaped unnoticed; to her Sadek persuaded his sister to go, and when there, under the protection of the young though prudent Ali, he pointed out how easy it would be for them to make their way to Asterabad, particularly if the widow herself, to whom the whole of that country was well known, would accompany her. This scheme succeeded without the least suspicion being thrown upon any one, and after having threaded their way through the intricate forests, they were rewarded for their fatigues by reaching the gates of Asterabad in safety.

Vague reports of all the horrors which had taken place at Tehran, after the escape of Zohrab and his father, had reached Asterabad, but the death of the Princess was still unknown. Zohrab's mind, however, was a prey to constant and unceasing apprehension for her safety. The armlet, the fatal armlet, was ever before his eyes, and left him not a moment's peace. He revolved in his thoughts all the probabilities of its being found, and foresaw that if it fell into the hands of the humpback, an event most

likely to happen, the dreaded discovery must take place; for being delivered to the Shah, it would tell its own most intelligible tale. He lived in apprehension of news from the capital; his brave spirit was subdued by a thousand conflicting emotions, all tending to destroy that exertion which his country and friends now expected from him. He no longer in their eyes appeared the same person: instead of exhibiting that alacrity for which he had been so famous, he was thoughtful and uneasy, seeking solitude, and shunning whatever would otherwise have been full of attraction.

One morning, at the earliest dawn, he was awakened by what seemed to be the sobs and moanings of some person in distress; they were female lamentations; he listened again and again, and still the sounds were repeated, and even appeared to increase. He called to his servant, who slept without, to go see what was the matter. He soon returned, saying that two strange women, accompanied by a Persian youth, had taken possession of the entrance of the principal gate, had there established themselves; that the women were crying most piteously, the cry of death, and were calling upon the name of Zohrab Khan to come to their relief. In spite of every remonstrance, nothing could persuade them to desist. Zohrab, whose mind was prepared to receive intelligence subversive of all hope for Amima's safety, started up, struck with conviction that every apprehension was realized; a deadly paleness came over him, cold sweat ran down his forehead, and his limbs could scarcely support him, when, with a dress loosely thrown over his person, he followed his servant to the gate. There he immediately recognized his faithful Ali, who rushed to kiss his hand, and to throw himself at his feet. But who are the women? thought he. Ali's mother also seized his hand and kissed it, and he recognized her without any difficulty; but the other woman remained closely veiled, increasing her cries and lamentations.

"Who are you? in the name of Allah!" said Zohrab, not having recognized Mariam. "Speak—why do you cry thus? what is the cause of your grief?"

"Oh, my master!" said the boy, "we have brought bad news—the Lady Amima—" It was not necessary for him

to finish the phrase—the stricken youth heard the words, covered his face with his hands, and fled to his apartment as if he expected there to meet the spirit of his departed love.

The scene of woe which followed this disclosure is not to be described. We must give our hero time to grieve—his was a deep and inaudible grief. In the estimation of his countrymen it was unmanly and reprehensible—tears for the loss of a woman they despise and suppress. Zohrab had no disguise in his nature, and he allowed his heart to express its true feelings. At the same time he respected the prejudices of his countrymen, and therefore did not expose himself to their gaze, so long as grief held dominion over him. But when at length he had succeeded in subduing his feelings, a reaction took place, which at once called into life all his latent energies, and restored him to the notice and admiration of his family and friends. He seemed to have shaken off by one great effort all the anxieties which had weighed him down, and he again stood forward the energetic youth, who before his captivity had formed the glory and pride of his country. It seemed as if his nature was renewed—he became the life and soul of the city—he encouraged every one, both by precept and example, to meet with vigour the storm that was about to break over them. He was to be seen in every workshop encouraging the manufacturers of arms in their labour, and was early among the soldiery, exercising them in the use of those arms. The mortal hatred which he had sworn against the murderer of her, for whom alone he cared to live, impelled every thought and every exertion. He felt that in his own person he could encounter the whole invading force, and avowed himself ready to become a sacrifice to atone for her blood, which, in his conscience, he was convinced had been spilt on account of his negligence.

In providing for the unfortunate Mariam, which he had done by placing her an inmate in his own family, he determined never to see her, and steadily to avoid every thing which might awaken in his mind recollections of the lost Amima. He knew how hopeless as well as how enervating would be any regrets for the past, and, although the wretched Mariam was always making endeavours to

throw herself in his way, still he had fortitude sufficient to persevere in his resolution, and found himself all the better for it.

His father, however, who, during his adventurous life had learnt how to take advantage of every circumstance which fortune might throw in his way, as soon as Mariam had reached Asterabad, and had made known her story, conceived that through her brother Sadek, some correspondence might be established, which directly or indirectly would throw some light upon the meditated operations of the Shah against the city. But when he consulted his son thereon, he found him so averse to holding communication with one whom he esteemed the executioner of his mistress, that he no longer urged the subject. Besides Zohrab was certain, from the character of the individual, how hopeless any attempt would be to induce him to turn traitor.

He was, however, as anxious as his father to establish some mode of acquiring intelligence; and, from his long acquaintance with men and things about the court, he thought that he could at once name the man best suited to their purpose—the most able, the most avaricious, and the most treacherous—and that man he knew was the humpback.

Zaul Khan willingly agreed to this; the more so, because during his residence at Tehran he had not neglected opportunities of sounding the depth of the barber's honesty, which indeed he had found very shallow. They then unanimously pitched upon the youth Ali, as the fittest bearer of their proposals, both because they could depend upon his fidelity and intelligence, and because he would be likely to pass free and unsuspected. Zohrab accordingly addressed a letter to the humpback, and in direct terms offered him certain sums of gold, if he would convey back true and certain intelligence of the intended movements of the Shah; of the plan of the projected attack; with as correct a statement as possible of dates, persons, and numbers. This done, they called the youth before them, explained the nature of the service required from him, and enjoined the greatest secrecy and precaution. They then gave him the letter, which he was ordered to deliver secretly to the humpback, together with

a sealed parcel enclosing a sum of tomauns, which he was also to deliver whenever he had received the answer. The boy lent an ear to his instructions with all the attention of an old spy, and as he well knew every inch of the ground over which he was about to travel, he felt confidence in himself, and having received his master's hearty "God be with you," straightway took his departure.

The father and the son had taken upon themselves the principal responsibility of providing for the defence and security of Asterabad. They had visited and caused to be repaired all the towers, strengthened the gates, cleared out the ditch, and made the approaches to the city as open as the encroaching nature of the dense surrounding vegetation would allow. They had in former times occasionally purchased cannon of various caliber from the Russian vessels which came occasionally to the small harbour some eight miles from Asterabad, and had manufactured a sufficient quantity of gunpowder, an art known very generally in the East. The guns were placed in different positions on the walls, and gave a great feeling of security to the inhabitants, who, in the days we speak of, attributed miraculous powers to such instruments.

One large gun in particular, which had been one of the curiosities of the city ever since the days of Shah Abbas, was mounted immediately over the Tehran gate, and commanded the road from which it was most likely the invading army would first appear. A fortunate day and hour was fixed for its installation, a ceremony which was conducted with considerable solemnity; the whole city was collected to see it; the mollahs were there with their prayers, the women with their shrill cry of encouragement; and the governor, his son, the principal men of Asterabad, with the Turcomans, were congregated on the spot to give directions. After considerable labour it was raised, by means of rude though effective machinery, to the summit of the tower, and then shouts of *mashallah* and *barikallah* rent the air.

During the progress of this operation, an apparently way-worn traveller was seen to enter the gate, mounted upon a sorry broken-down steed, himself meanly dressed, and in no wise worthy of observation, except in being a Persian, a *Sahara nichin*, a liver in the plain. His sheep-

skin cap was drooping and dusty, his caba of cotton was rent, his red cloth *shalwars* were torn and stained with frequent rains, and his boots had seen their best days. A battered sword hung by his side, a rusty pistol protruded from his girdle, and there seemed no one article about him worth stealing; but with this, there was a certain air, a substratum of gentility, which crept out in various parts of his person, which showed that he was not quite a common man. As he rode slowly on, he looked about him in surprise at what was going forward, when one of the Turcoman chiefs, whose eyes were accustomed to the scrutiny of persons, exclaimed, "By the soul of Zohrab Khan, that is the mehmandar! That is the dog Shir Khan Beg!" The eyes of all present were turned towards the stranger, and at once he was recognised. The recognition was made rather in derision than in hostility, for in the execution of his office during the stay of the deputies at Tehran, he had inspired them more with contempt than hatred; but his apparition at this present juncture excited universal astonishment. In Zaul Khan it excited suspicion, and immediately he was armed at all points against a trick. The deplorable looking Beg was forthwith invited to dismount, and mutual favourable signs of recognition having taken place between himself and many of those present, he seemed entirely to have laid by the airs and graces for which he was so well known, and with the humblest mien and language he dismounted and approached them. He appeared to be lame, walked with considerable difficulty, and looked more an object of compassion, than the brilliant and flourishing personage whom their eyes had been accustomed to behold adorned with silks and brocade.

"What has happened, Sir mehmandar," said Zaul Khan. "You are welcome. But why alone? why so fallen? has fate struck you?"

"May your condescension never diminish," said Shir Khan, in a very subdued voice. "Ashes are strewn upon my head; I have fallen from above to below; I am come to kiss your feet, and to ask a corner to sit in."

"Tell us your story," said the Blind Lion; "we are your friends; we know no evil of you: why are ye thus fallen?"

"What can I say?" said he; "in consequence of your flight, the Shah seized upon me, and beat me; this is only one among the many miseries which have ensued from that event. I have fled from his hands, and praise be to Allah that I have fallen into yours! You have been the cause of my misfortune, therefore you must protect me. I appeal to you as Mussulmen, let not the destitute apply in vain."

This short appeal softened the hearts of those around, and every one seemed anxious to receive him with kindness. Zaul Khan, alone, did not easily give credence to his narrative, although he did not refuse him a hospitable reception. He inspected him with a most suspicious scrutiny, with eyes that might rival the brilliancy of an eagle's, and as he conceived that he detected an unusual degree of false humility in his looks and general bearing, said, "You must pardon us, Sir Beg, we are rustics, and are plain spoken folks; we call a man a man, and a dog a dog. This is war time; this is a season for open eyes and anxious ears. Whatever you say is right, no doubt; heaven forbid that we should disbelieve you; but you come from a king who is a wonder, a misfortune if ever there was one, who won't let the back of his hand know what is going on in the palm thereof. You too, *mashallah*, praise be to God, are one of those men, who by your own account are not like other men, and are a fit servant of such a king. Not to suspect you of something more than beaten feet, and ragged clothes, and to believe your story at once, would be an insult upon your understanding which your best friends would not put upon you. How much more then does it behove us, who are in open rebellion, when they see a personage like you, known to have enjoyed the king's confidence, to have been distinguished by a beating, to receive him with doubt and precaution. Heaven forbid that we should break through the laws of hospitality! that we withhold from you the welcome of peace, that we should not feed and lodge you, or that we should despoil you in any way!—but for our own safety we must ascertain whether, within the recesses of those unworthy garments which clothe your person, are not concealed papers or other things injurious to our safety, or to the welfare of those who look to us for alliance and protection. Al-

low then that proper search be made, show us that our suspicions are unfounded, and when we are satisfied, we need not say how thankful we shall be to receive one amongst us, who by his valour will add to our strength, and by his wisdom to our councils.

"True you say, O Khan!" exclaimed the humble spoken Beg; "if there is wisdom in one man's words above those of another, it is in yours. If *Aflatoon* had opened his lips he could not have spoken better. So much are the men of Tehran astonished at the skill which you have displayed, making play under their beards, and dancing round their fingers, that we no longer say, as learned as *Socrat*, or as ingenious as *Locman*; we now say as cunning as *Zaul Khan*. The king himself is all astonishment; from morning to night he sits in a corner with the tip of his finger in his mouth, exclaiming '*Bah! bah! bah!*' and saying nothing but 'Wonderful devil,' and 'Marvellous dog's son!' By your soul, by the head of *Zohrab Khan*, and I can't say more, people talk so much and so continually about you that, as I am a true believer, the prophet and the twelve *Imans* are now becoming nothing—nothing more than dirt. I, in truth, I who amongst men am not altogether dust, I have longed to rub my head against your threshold. You see I am come! Whose dog am I, that should not say yes to all you say? *Bismillah!* in the name of Allah! search, look: and first let me remain without a cap," upon which taking his cap from his head, he turned it inside out, lowered the lining, in which the only paper that was concealed, was a copy of some lines in which he attempted to describe the beauty of his mistress. He then exhibited his pockets, in which there was nothing save some crumbs and onions; he showed that in the baggy parts of his *shalwars*, a pair of shoes, and a lump of cold rice were secreted; in his breast he wore his purse, and in his girdle a knife, a pistol and an iron ramrod.

"Is there any thing more at your service, Sir Khan?" said the accommodating Beg.

"There is no harm done," said *Zaul Khan*. "Your face is white. Those boots, however old they be, still may contain riches, let us take one survey of them, and all will be well."

Upon this the Beg pulled off his boots, and exhibited his feet, which still bore marks of the punishment they had undergone; and that fact more than any other spoke in his favour, for he seemed to have produced conviction of his honesty in almost every one's mind save Zaul Khan's, and therefore he for the present was subjected to no other scrutiny.

Shir Khan, who had hitherto played his part to admiration, finding himself secure, turned his eyes about, in the hope of discovering the moonshee, Mirza Shireen Ali, to whom his instructions more particularly pointed, as the man upon whose treachery dependence might be placed. He soon discerned him, by the constant discharge of fawning, flattery, and sycophancy, which he did not cease making upon whoever chose to hear him. Compliments upon their refinement and eloquence to the rough Turcoman chiefs—congratulations upon the merits of his son to Zaul Khan—kissing of hands and slavish meanness, interlarded with apt quotations from the loves of Ferhad and Shireen to Zohrab; and indiscriminate offers of service, as well as little acts of attention to every one present. When the Mirza's eyes met the Beg's, he made an inclination of the head, as if to say, 'I am your servant,' whilst there was evident treason in his look, which the Beg thought he could understand.

The meeting having broken up, Zaul Khan appointed a ferash to wait upon Shir Khan Beg, ordered his horse to be fed, and prepared a room for him in his house. The Beg, however, would in no wise accept of a better place for his lodging than a corner of the stable in which his horse was kept, urging that the beast was one which he prized, and that his care was necessary to restore it to its former vigour. Finding that this would not be permitted, he agreed to take up his quarters where they had been provided, but he insisted upon carrying his saddle with him, saying that he was so accustomed to use it as his pillow that he could not sleep without it. No objection was made to this, and the night passed off without any occurrence worth relating; but during the course of it he had managed unobserved to disengage from within the padding of the saddle, a roll of papers, consisting of firmans and letters, of which he was ordered to make such

low then that proper search be made, show us that our suspicions are unfounded, and when we are satisfied, we need not say how thankful we shall be to receive one amongst us, who by his valour will add to our strength, and by his wisdom to our councils.

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Shir Khan, who had hitherto played his part to admiration, finding himself secure, turned his eyes about, in the hope of discovering the moonshee, Mirza Shireen Ali, to whom his instructions more particularly pointed, as the man upon whose treachery dependence might be placed. He soon discerned him, by the constant discharge of fawning, flattery, and sycophancy, which he did not cease making upon whoever chose to hear him. Compliments upon their refinement and eloquence to the rough Turcoman chiefs—congratulations upon the merits of his son to Zaul Khan—kissing of hands and slavish meanness, interlarded with apt quotations from the loves of Ferhad and Shireen to Zohrab; and indiscriminate offers of service, as well as little acts of attention to every one present. When the Mirza's eyes met the Beg's, he made an inclination of the head, as if to say, 'I am your servant,' whilst there was evident treason in his look, which the Beg thought he could understand.

The meeting having broken up, Zaul Khan appointed a ferash to wait upon Shir Khan Beg, ordered his horse to be fed, and prepared a room for him in his house. The Beg, however, would in no wise accept of a better place for his lodging than a corner of the stable in which his horse was kept, urging that the beast was one which he prized, and that his care was necessary to restore it to its former vigour. Finding that this would not be permitted, he agreed to take up his quarters where they had been provided, but he insisted upon carrying his saddle with him, saying that he was so accustomed to use it as his pillow that he could not sleep without it. No objection was made to this, and the night passed off without any occurrence worth relating; but during the course of it he had managed unobserved to disengage from within the padding of the saddle, a roll of papers, consisting of firmans and letters, of which he was ordered to make such

Desert; and precisely in the same manner in which he had preserved the daughter, so he had, some years back, the father, and installed him in the small tenement which we have already described as situated near that village. But with such sagacity and secrecy was this conducted, that none but himself was aware that the order had not been executed; and as he knew that his own life depended upon the secret being preserved, so every plan which he formed was always with the view to keep it from publicity. The miserable peasantry of the village, ignorant and barbarous as they were, knew that such a being existed, but who or what he was no one cared to inquire, and thus year succeeded year, leaving Hussein Kûli Khan in security and oblivion, cheering Sadek in the success of his scheme, and in the comfortable satisfaction of having saved the life of one to whom he was attached by so many ties.

As soon as the Shah informed him of his determination to put his niece to death, and that he had selected him to do the deed, Sadek's mind was immediately made up to save the daughter as he had the father. He had been ordered to make away with her unknown to any one, but he was obliged to make an accomplice of the Khajeh bashi, in order to draw her from the anderoon without exciting suspicion. He selected two of the Shah's fleetest horses, from among those kept in training to be used on emergencies, and disguised as he was, performed the rapid journey in the manner we have already described. It being a matter of life and death, he could do no otherwise than steel his heart and shut his ears to the temporary pain which he knew must be inflicted upon his unfortunate charge, feeling that the quiet which would follow would soon restore her strength; and as it was necessary for him to re-appear before the Shah on the very next morning within a reasonable time, it became urgent to lose not a moment's time in depositing the maiden where he did, a feat of rapidity which none but horses such as they bestrode could have performed. In fact, he appeared before his master as usual, almost at the same hour in the morning at which he was accustomed to awake him; and in so doing he said not a word, but put on his accustomed unmoved and stern aspect. The Shah did not ven-

ture to ask a single question, trusting in the fidelity of his servant, and he remained satisfied, by the inflexible bearing of the man, that his orders had been but too faithfully executed. And thus for the moment ended the horrid tragedy.

In the state of things that followed he was more than ever interested that nothing should compromise his secrecy, and this circumstance made him more stern and silent than before. He was persecuted by his sister Mariam, who, in deploring her own miseries, was always most inquisitive about the fate of her mistress, and sometimes committed herself by acts of such imprudence, that she formed the torment of his existence. She was constantly expressing her desire to proceed to Asterabad, to gain an asylum in the family of Zohrab, where she was certain of a welcome, and although Sadek saw that this scheme was in every way objectionable, yet rather than continue open to her indiscretions he at length ceded, and assured her that he would soon form some scheme for conducting her there in safety. The widow of the late chief huntsman, during the late events, had taken refuge in her old dwelling at Firouzabad, together with her son, the attached servant of Zohrab, who thus had escaped unnoticed; to her Sadek persuaded his sister to go, and when there, under the protection of the young though prudent Ali, he pointed out how easy it would be for them to make their way to Asterabad, particularly if the widow herself, to whom the whole of that country was well known, would accompany her. This scheme succeeded without the least suspicion being thrown upon any one, and after having threaded their way through the intricate forests, they were rewarded for their fatigues by reaching the gates of Asterabad in safety.

Vague reports of all the horrors which had taken place at Tehran, after the escape of Zohrab and his father, had reached Asterabad, but the death of the Princess was still unknown. Zohrab's mind, however, was a prey to constant and unceasing apprehension for her safety. The armlet, the fatal armlet, was ever before his eyes, and left him not a moment's peace. He revolved in his thoughts all the probabilities of its being found, and foresaw that if it fell into the hands of the humpback, an event most

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likely to happen, the dreaded discovery must take place; for being delivered to the Shah, it would tell its own most intelligible tale. He lived in apprehension of news from the capital; his brave spirit was subdued by a thousand conflicting emotions, all tending to destroy that exertion which his country and friends now expected from him. He no longer in their eyes appeared the same person: instead of exhibiting that alacrity for which he had been so famous, he was thoughtful and uneasy, seeking solitude, and shunning whatever would otherwise have been full of attraction.

One morning, at the earliest dawn, he was awakened by what seemed to be the sobs and moanings of some person in distress; they were female lamentations; he listened again and again, and still the sounds were repeated, and even appeared to increase. He called to his servant, who slept without, to go see what was the matter. He soon returned, saying that two strange women, accompanied by a Persian youth, had taken possession of the entrance of the principal gate, had there established themselves; that the women were crying most piteously, the cry of death, and were calling upon the name of Zohrab Khan to come to their relief. In spite of every remonstrance, nothing could persuade them to desist. Zohrab, whose mind was prepared to receive intelligence subversive of all hope for Amima's safety, started up, struck with conviction that every apprehension was realized; a deadly paleness came over him, cold sweat ran down his forehead, and his limbs could scarcely support him, when, with a dress loosely thrown over his person, he followed his servant to the gate. There he immediately recognized his faithful Ali, who rushed to kiss his hand, and to throw himself at his feet. But who are the women? thought he. Ali's mother also seized his hand and kissed it, and he recognized her without any difficulty; but the other woman remained closely veiled, increasing her cries and lamentations.

"Who are you? in the name of Allah!" said Zohrab, not having recognized Mariam. "Speak—why do you cry thus? what is the cause of your grief?"

"Oh, my master!" said the boy, "we have brought bad news—the Lady Amima—" It was not necessary for him

to finish the phrase—the stricken youth heard the words, covered his face with his hands, and fled to his apartment as if he expected there to meet the spirit of his departed love.

The scene of woe which followed this disclosure is not to be described. We must give our hero time to grieve—his was a deep and inaudible grief. In the estimation of his countrymen it was unmanly and reprehensible—tears for the loss of a woman they despise and suppress. Zohrab had no disguise in his nature, and he allowed his heart to express its true feelings. At the same time he respected the prejudices of his countrymen, and therefore did not expose himself to their gaze, so long as grief held dominion over him. But when at length he had succeeded in subduing his feelings, a reaction took place, which at once called into life all his latent energies, and restored him to the notice and admiration of his family and friends. He seemed to have shaken off by one great effort all the anxieties which had weighed him down, and he again stood forward the energetic youth, who before his captivity had formed the glory and pride of his country. It seemed as if his nature was renewed—he became the life and soul of the city—he encouraged every one, both by precept and example, to meet with vigour the storm that was about to break over them. He was to be seen in every workshop encouraging the manufacturers of arms in their labour, and was early among the soldiery, exercising them in the use of those arms. The mortal hatred which he had sworn against the murderer of her, for whom alone he cared to live, impelled every thought and every exertion. . He felt that in his own person he could encounter the whole invading force, and avowed himself ready to become a sacrifice to atone for her blood, which, in his conscience, he was convinced had been spilt on account of his negligence.

In providing for the unfortunate Mariam, which he had done by placing her an inmate in his own family, he determined never to see her, and steadily to avoid every thing which might awaken in his mind recollections of the lost Amima. He knew how hopeless as well as how enervating would be any regrets for the past, and, although the wretched Mariam was always making endeavours to

rage increasing, until at length, unable to contain the excess of her passion, she seized upon her companion, and clawed upon his face and beard with the violence of one bereft of reason, "I will, I must have the letter," she roared out.

The barber, who knew full well the vantage ground which he occupied, forcibly rose from his seat, and abandoned his tent to the sole possession of the violent woman. He left his habitation with all speed, followed by Ali, to whom he beckoned, and when they had reached the skirts of the camp, he seated himself on the grass, and taking out his writing implements, wrote an answer to the letter which he had received.

He then sealed it, and looking into the face of the youthful messenger, said, "You have something more for my hand, have you not?" "Yes," said Ali, "*bismillah*, in the name of the prophet, here it is;" upon which he drew from his breast the bag of tomauns, which he duly placed into the hands of the traitor.

"It is well," said the humpback, as he looked at the glittering coin, with an eye of covetousness and exultation. "Thou art a good servant! There, take this letter; give it to thy master, and when thou comest again be careful how thou approachest my tent. Send for me; I will come to thee; and as thou valuest thy life, never speak to me before a third person."

Upon this the youth took his leave, left the camp, and retraced his steps whence he came, rejoicing.

Not so the humpback; he returned with slow and uncertain gait to his tent, occupied by one whom, though he feared as standing in the way of his avarice, yet he could not help contemning for her indiscretion. She, in the meanwhile, had acquired sufficient command over herself to meet the humpback with calmness, although coldly, but his conduct on this occasion laid the foundation of a determination in her breast to revenge herself upon him the first favourable occasion; and as this desire became the constant dream of her thoughts, she did not cease devising every scheme which rancour and malignity could suggest for succeeding in her determination. Foiled in her attempt, as we have already seen, of securing the *Shah's* permission to follow the camp, she had taken her

measures accordingly, and without any assistance but her own exertions, she contrived to reach Firouzabad before the Shah's arrival, and as soon as her father's tent was pitched she took possession of one corner, bidding defiance to his entreaties to return to Tehran. It may be conceived to what extent her feelings were excited by the scene which we have already described, when we state that her real motive for the step she had taken was her love for Zohrab, who she fondly expected would no longer reject her, now that her rival was no more, and for whose protection and preservation she hoped her interference, should the moment ever come, might avail. It will soon be seen what a fatal error the humpback committed, in withholding from her the communication he had received.

The Shah, having left his capital with all the parade and ceremony which usually attended him on such occasions, timed by the astrologers, lauded by the mollahs, accompanied by the whole population of the city, arrived in due time at his camp. There he immediately took the command of his army, and although he appeared to make light of the expedition, asserting that ere a week had elapsed he would be master of Asterabad, yet, well acquainted as he was with the resources of his opponents, and with the difficult nature of the country about to be invaded, he did not omit any precaution which might ensure his success. Having called his officers together, he ordered a large body of cavalry to push forwards, to ascertain where they might first expect to meet the enemy, to take possession of the defiles, and there to wait until the infantry should come to their support. At the same time he ordered the march of the *Tuffenkchis*, and the advance of the artillery, issuing his commands for a general rising of the peasantry, to make straight the road for the passage of the guns, and in case of absolute stoppage, to carry them bodily onwards over every impediment.

He was in the midst of these occupations, when the Vizir walked in, and stood before him.

"Has any thing occurred, Mirza?" said the Shah.

"As I am your sacrifice," answered the Vizir, "your

slave Shir Khan Beg is returned, and requests to kiss your feet."

"Let him come."

Upon this the Beg, dusted, torn, and wayworn, was seen to walk with difficulty towards the presence, and having made his lowest obeisance, with his hands resting before him, stood before the king.

"Well, so you are returned," said the Shah; "what say those dogs' sons at Asterabad? Have they read our firman?"

"Let the royal condescension never be less," answered the Beg in the greatest humility; "owing to the poor exertions of this least of men, they have read it."

"Relate thy story from beginning to end," said the Shah, "and don't lie, or make thyself over officious. First, where did you go?"

"As I eat the salt of the king of kings—as I am a true believer, and as I hope to live, I will not lie; I will speak the truth; it is this—"

"Speak on," said the Shah.

"Overcoming one hundred thousand difficulties of road, of jungle, of marauders, by dint of keeping his eyes open, your slave reached the walls of Asterabad; and he entered the gate just as the rebellious dogs (may their souls grill in jehanum!) were mounting a large gun over the protecting tower. By the head of the Shah, it was a gun which since the days of Jemsheed has never yet been seen! Your slave asked no questions, but entered. He found the whole city assembled; Zaul Khan, the hostage Zohrab, the Turcomans, all were there. Your slave was immediately recognised and surrounded. One said, 'Seize him;' another, 'Kill;'; another would have blown him up; but Zaul stopped all their proceedings, and put questions to your slave. By the salt of the Shah! your slave gave such answers, that one after the other, all rogues and dogs' sons as they are! they looked at him with astonishment, and exclaimed, 'Marvellous wise king must that be, who employs such servants!' Your slave made them all less than dust. At length Zaul Khan the cunning said, 'All this is very well; but we must have proof that all you say be true; we must search you.' Your slave said,

' *Bismillah*, search on!' upon which they turned him inside out. No paper, no firman did they find. Then they remained with their noses in the air, whilst your slave laughed within his beard at them, and said to himself, 'You have got Shir Khan Beg to deal with, and not one of your cows of Turcomans!'

"Never mind what you said to yourself, ass!" said the Shah. "Speak on."

"Your slave then looked about for the Shirazi, whom he recognized, and soon they understood each other. If your slave has wit; if he can laugh at men's beards; if, by the condescension of the Shah, he can make fools walk round his finger; he gives all the credit to his saddle! A *tekeltch*,* by the blessing of the Prophet, is a wonderful thing."

"Wonderful dog's son art thou!" said the Shah, smiling.

"At night your slave took from his *tekeltch* your Majesty's blessed firman, which, if placed on a rock would melt it into dust, and also his Highness the Vizir's letter to the bankrupt moonshee. The next day your slave sought the Mirza, spoke to him, secured his obedience to the Shah's commands, and here is his letter in answer. The king of kings may depend upon frequent information from him; and when the day comes, by the blessing of Allah! he will secure to the Shah's victorious army an easy entrance into the city. On the following morning, long ere the dawn, your slave stuck the auspicious firman upon the gate of the royal mosque, having previously secured the co-operation of one of the most influential molahs; and then, with that wit which by the favour of the asylum of the universe he possesses, making his famous horse Ser-mest pass for a sick *yaboo* at the city gate, and himself for a lame beggar, your slave has returned to claim your majesty's skirt, and to rub his unworthy forehead against the royal threshold.

"*Barikallah*, well done!" said the Shah, amused by the narrative, and pleased with the results; "you have made your face white; the Shah is pleased with thee."

* A *tekeltch* is the padding used in a Persian saddle, which is generally detached from the saddle-tree.

Upon which the overjoyed Beg knelt down and kissed the ground, whilst the Shah cried out to Sadek, who was in attendance, "Bring hither the *calaat*, the dress of honour;" and addressing the Vizir, said, "let a firman be made out, in order that it may be known that the Shah knows how to reward a good servant. From this day he becomes a Khan, and commands a thousand men." Upon which a *catebi*, a rich cloak of cloth of gold, trimmed with fine sables, was thrown over his shoulders, until he should be more formally invested with the whole dress; and then the king, turning to the entranced and overjoyed Beg, said, "Shir Khan *mubarek*, good fortune attend you!"

Should my reader have seized the character which I have endeavoured to draw of the Beg—that of an active, lying, vain, flattering, amusing Irâni—he may perhaps conceive the raptures with which the new-created Khan heard the words which struck his ear, coming not from an ordinary mouth, but from one whence flowed the issues of prosperity or wretchedness, to whom men looked for life, and even for the possession of the air they breathed. He trembled with joy as he poured out the expressions of his gratitude, and when dismissed, speedily took his way to his own quarters to await the arrival of the emblems of his future honours. He had not waited long ere he espied Sadek, attended by a *ferash*, carrying a tray upon his head covered over with a Cashmire shawl napkin, trimmed with gold fringe, and accompanied by one of the *mirzas* belonging to the Grand Vizir, making their way towards him. His heart leaped with joy at the sight, and as they approached, he stepped forward with the utmost obsequiousness to receive them. When they had entered the tent, Sadek took the royal firman into both his hands, and breast high presented it to its owner, saying, "This is the king's *rakm*;" upon which the whole party standing up, the *mirza* read it aloud. It stated the approbation of the Shah of the services rendered by Shir Khan Beg, and what was principally gratifying to his ears, he heard himself styled *Alijah*, the high in station, and in conclusion announced that the title of Khan was conferred upon him. Upon which, receiving the precious document into his own hands, he carried it with the profoundest veneration

to his head, whilst those around him showered down reiterated "*mubareks*" upon him.

He then was invested with the dress ; a brocade *caba* or vest was fitted to his person ; a Cashmire shawl adorned his waist, whilst a cap with a *goush pish*, or an ear-girding shawl over it, usurped the place of his dusty sheep-skin. Then over all was thrown the dignified *catebi*. At length appeared the diamond hilted dagger, upon the possession of which, the deepest longings of his youth had been exhausted. Although the diamonds were little better than bits of discoloured crystal, yet a *kord muraseh* bore a reputation that made its owner so superior to the rest of mankind, that he did not cease feasting his eyes upon it as it protruded from his girdle ; a sword, with gold enamelled knobs, hung at his side, and completed his adjustment. Then the firman was stuck in a conspicuous manner into the folds of his cap ; and thus adorned, complimented right and left to the fullest gratification of his vanity, he mounted his horse and proceeded to make his *selam* to the Shah. He took the most circuitous road which he could devise through the camp, in order to exhibit himself in all his honours, and never before had he cocked his cap to more satisfaction, or looked with more self-complacency over his person. The reception which he met from the Shah was all he could wish, and for three successive days, arrayed in his *calaat*, and with the firman in his head, did he enjoy his dignity, and not a little the envy which he created in the breasts of his brother Gholams.

The Shah, in heaping honours upon this vainest of his servants, had marked him as a proper officer to take the lead in the most dangerous part of the expedition, namely exploring the forests, which in the hands of an expert enemy would require all his skill and prudence. He was thus intended to take possession of the road for the army, clearing the defiles, and threading the paths through the jungle. The country, as far as the commencement of the forest, was open, like the rest of Persia, and of easy access to the troops. There was only one celebrated defile, the *Teng Shemshir bûr* (so called from the tradition which records that Ali, with one blow of his scimitar had cleaved the rock in twain,) which it was necessary to re-

cure in order to obtain a free passage into Mazandaran; and thither the Shah was anxious to despatch in all haste the new made Khan, with a chosen body of men, in order that the enemy might not be beforehand with him. Accordingly, he received orders to depart immediately, and to keep possession of the pass until the arrival of the main army. The airs of importance which he exhibited upon this occasion, even were new to his own countrymen. He was seen in all parts of the camp, calling up his men, inspecting their horses and arms, and evincing a degree of activity that frequently told upon the shoulders of those who did not sufficiently second his zeal. At length he departed, but he had scarcely passed the defiles of *Serenza*, when he was surprised by the appearance of a small company of horsemen whose movements were indicative of those of spies; for they kept at a distance on the declivities of the surrounding hills, and carefully avoided approaching him. The cap which they wore, so much larger than the one common to Kizzilbashs, announced them to be Turcomans; besides their spears were thicker, and they carried them in a different mode to that used in Persia. Shir Khan made every effort in his power to come up with them, but in vain; they evaded him with so much dexterity, always however managing to keep him in sight, that he remained, as the expression goes, "hand broken and head bewildered." He, on his powerful horse, followed by two chosen gholams, darted onward, over rocks, stones, down steepes, up the most difficult acclivities, in the hope of overtaking them, but to no purpose; they seemed to mock his efforts, and as fast as he shewed himself on one eminence they rose conspicuous on the one beyond it; until at length, in utter despair, he was obliged to give over the chase and return to his main body. He was dispirited and enraged. It was evident that the enemy had taken the field earlier than the Shah, and had already pushed their parties of observation to the very skirts of the Shah's camp, and must evidently have taken possession of the defiles. With these discouraging prospects, Shir Khan returned to his troops, and calling his officers around him, dismounted, and seating himself upon a patch of grass, addressed them *as follows*:

"See," said he, "what a thing is *takdeer*, is destiny! I, who am Shir Khan, I, who have laughed at the beards of the Turcomans, who have made the man whom it is the fashion to call famous, an ass in the face of the world—who have made their great Zohrab less than a dog—here am I seated on the grass, delayed and brain-worn. Maledictions upon their beards! maledictions upon their ancestry, if, perchance, they ever had fathers or mothers! Whenever I get a flea into my shirt, I hunt it—in and out one fold, up and down another, until I catch it—and then kill it; but these vermin, (whose dogs are fleas when compared to them!) they are not to be caught. You men! (addressing the group standing before him,) wherefore should I speak on? You know who and what Shir Khan is! He has done things, he has seen countries, he has talked to men, and when the service of the Shah requires it, he treats them like Franks and unbelievers; he has succeeded in every thing; he has carried all before him; but now, *takdeer* has set all crooked, and here he is like a dog looking after his own tail. What shall we do? where go? It is plain these dogs' fathers, the Turcoman and Asterabadis have already taken possession of the passes! What shall I do? The Shah must know this instantly, whatever may happen. It will excite all his rage, and perhaps he may say Shir Khan has not been active enough. May I defile destiny's grave! for Allah better knows, I may have been made a Khan one day, only to eat dirt on the next!"

Upon this, a rough, weather-beaten Gholam, who had followed the Shah in all his campaigns, said with humility, "Shall your servant go to the camp, O, Khan! He will get there by the middle of the night, and be back to-morrow with the Shah's orders?"

"You say well," said Shir Khan, "I would have gone myself, but I can't leave my troops. The army must advance immediately, or the campaign will be fruitless.—Upon which he ordered his mirza, for he had lost no time in setting up a scribe, to make a statement of his situation to the Prime Vizir, signifying his determination to push on to the defile, but urging that he ought to be supported by the main army, since it was evident the enemy had already made effectual and alarming advances. Upon this

the volunteer was despatched, and the party slowly advanced to take up their quarters at the nearest village on the road for the night.

The Shah was a thorough soldier; all the adventures and circumstance of war were agreeable to him. He then forgot the degraded state of his person, and from the energy of his character he became equal and superior to other men. The more difficulty stood in his way, the more the superiority of his mind was evinced, and that superiority, putting him in good humour with himself, made him forget his other deficiencies, and softened his feelings toward his fellow-creatures.

The information transmitted to him by Shir Khan, instead of rousing his wrath, only produced an agreeable excitement. The instant he was informed of the circumstances, he ordered the *jarchi bashi*, or the herald in chief, to appear before him, and commanded him to proceed into the different quarters of the camp, according to established custom, and announce the departure of the army on the following morning towards Toweh, in the direction of the Teng Shemshir bûr. He then ordered all the different officers in command of the troops to assemble in his presence, and issued his commands with an alacrity and even joyousness of manner, which he was known to possess on similar occasions. Very soon afterwards the whole camp was in motion, different to the departure of a fleet, the canvas which was now spread, all at once was furled; and the field which but an hour before had been overlaid with tents and pavilions, was at once reduced to its former aridity of aspect. In all directions mules were driving in from the pastures to their appointed burthens; the din of their bells, the shouting of muleteers, the voices of commanding officers, the neighing of horses, and the exciting sounds of the *nokara khaneh*, the Persian military music, joined to the intense activity of every individual, working as it were for his life, under the very eye of a king and master who allowed no negligence of duty, all produced a scene wearing a character entirely its own. Not a tent at length was seen, saving a small crimson pavilion of beautiful form and dimensions, which the king himself occupied until the moment of his departure.

There he sat, exulting in a vein of malignant joy, at the

surprise and terror which he was about to strike into the hearts of those who had had the temerity to enter with him into a contest, which he was determined to push to the last extremity, and which every one felt must end in their extermination. At the same time, he was too sagacious not to take every measure of precaution in order to ensure his success, as if he were about to attack forces of the first magnitude. What he principally had to guard against was treachery; he felt that a poignard, or poison, might be as fatal to him as to the meanest hind, and that in a desultory war, such as this was likely to prove, in a closely wooded country, his person could not be as secure as if he were acting upon the bare unsheltered surface of the rugged Irân. He knew how open his countrymen were to bribery, and though he could trust them in war with a foreign enemy, still he did not feel quite so secure in a conflict with his own people.

He had returned Shir Khan's messenger, ordering that officer to advance and clear the Teng Shemshir bûr, were it occupied by the enemy, and at the same time informed him of the immediate advance of the army. His last order upon leaving Firouzabad was to the Ked Khoda of that place, enjoining him to forward the prince Fattah Ali with all haste, as soon as he should appear returning from Shiraz.

CHAPTER XII.

To forbear to pluck your enemy's beard when in your hand, is virtue more than human.

PERSIAN ETHICS.

ALI, after leaving the humpback, returned to his master without impediment, and delivered the letter of which he was the bearer to Zaul Khan. There was so much internal evidence of truth in its contents, that both father and son at once were of opinion to act upon the information it contained. The traitor gave an account of the

number of troops to be employed, of the names of their commanders, and of the artillery. He stated when it was likely that the Shah would begin his operations, and showed how easy it would be to advance even to the royal camp without opposition, and take possession of the passes before the royal troops could reach them.

The circumstance which most engaged the attention of Zaul, was the account given of the three pieces of heavy ordnance on their way, for the purpose of battering their walls and gates. With cavalry and infantry he was confident that it would be easy to cope, but guns were monsters which inspired such extreme dread throughout the country, that their reputation alone was tantamount to a defeat. He felt that a royal firman, backed by a *Müşkteh*'s *fetvah*, and enforced by cannon balls, were engines which his personal influence or ability could never overcome; therefore he determined, and Zohrab agreed with him in opinion, that all their endeavours must be directed to the destruction of the said guns, before they approached the city. Consequently an immediate advance was determined, and Zohrab was entrusted with the command of the vanguard, in conjunction with the old Turcoman chief, the Blind Lion, whose age and experience might be a check upon the impetuosity of the youth, and who was celebrated for his intimate knowledge of the country. It was settled that Zaul should take the command in the city, and not move further from his post than was necessary for its security, whilst Zohrab was entrusted with the operations without the walls. The determination with which father and son had tacitly inspired each other, of never submitting to the tyrant, under any terms short of independence for themselves and their friends, was a feeling, which, at the moment of parting, presented many frightful forebodings to their respective imaginations, and which required all the fortitude of the one, and all the self-command of the other, to keep under proper control. Our young hero had equipped himself as if he were about to attend a wedding. A magnificent Turcoman horse, the finest which the pastures of the plains of Kipchak could boast, stood ready caparisoned for him at the gate of the paternal mansion. It was a tall bay steed, with black feet, and hoofs like flint, black mane flowing

down its arched neck, with a small head, eyes like an antelope, and pointed ears. It boasted an Arab sire, from the Nejd, and the most celebrated mare of the black tents was its dam. He looked himself like the famous Afrasiab in person. He wore a glittering breastplate of steel inlaid with gold, whilst a helmet, from which floated two small feathers, was fastened to his brow with a crimson shawl, the ends of which fell in folds over his back. A sword of beautiful shape, though of unadorned scabbard, celebrated throughout Khorassan, and an heir-loom in his family, having, it is said, been the favourite weapon of the great Timoor, hung at his side; a pair of pistols in his girdle, and a Turcoman spear in his hand, completed his equipment; and never had so gallant a youth put foot into the stirrup, since those days when Rustum slew his devils, and Afrasiab, to use the language of Ferdûsi, covered Persia with the deep shades of night. His immediate attendant was the faithful Ali, who, now mounted upon a powerful horse, armed at all points, with the addition of his master's carbine slung at his side, was seen joyfully awaiting the signal to begin this his first campaign.

He had taken a long and affecting farewell of his mother—Mariam had mingled her cries with those of the other servants upon witnessing his departure—and he was now told by the astrologers that the fortunate hour was come—when, turning towards his father, he asked his blessing and forgiveness. Their hearts beat in unison when mentally they prayed to heaven for each other's security; and as a tear dropped from his father's eye upon his cheek, fearful of betraying weakness before the surrounding spectators, the noble youth with one bound seized his horse's main, vaulted into the saddle, and with a heart overflowing with love for his parents, with apprehensions for their safety, and with a fixed resolve to die in their behalf, he pushed forward at a rapid pace, followed by the warriors whom he was destined to lead.

Proceeding towards the Shah's position, Zohrab found the information of the humpback true; for he met with no impediment, until he reached the Teng Shemshir bûr. He, with his friend the Blind Lion, carefully examined this defile, and finding that it could be defended by a

small body against forces to almost any amount, selected such of his men as were best adapted to the service, stationed them in the most fitting position, and placed them under the orders of one of his steadiest officers. Then he himself, with a chosen few, pushed on to reconnoitre the Shah's camp at Firouzabad, always keeping in view the one principal object of destroying the three pieces of artillery, and remarking the various spots where, owing to the difficult nature of the country through which they must necessarily pass, an attack upon them might be made with most success.

It was Zohrab, in company with the Blind Lion, attended by Ali, who first discovered the advance of Shir Khan, and consequently they thought it prudent to make their retreat to the defile, where, according to every probability, the first essay of their mutual prowess would take place. They had made a sufficiently accurate survey of the approaching force, to be aware that it was intended as a vanguard of the army, and strong enough to endeavour to force the defile, and consequently, that it was necessary to take immediate measures to meet the attack.

A day and night passed away before the parties came within sight of each other. Shir Khan had been apprised that the Teng was already strongly occupied; for his reconnoitering officer had been received by a shot from one of the Asterabadi fusileers, and such an account had he brought of the effective manner in which they had fortified themselves, by making a succession of trenches across the mouth of the defile, that the Khan thought it was necessary to wait for a body of infantry on its way to join him, ere he ventured on an attack. He had recovered the apprehension of incurring the Shah's displeasure, by the letter from the Vizir, informing him of the advance of the army, and he was once again reinstated in full possession of his vanity and self-approbation.

"See those cows of Turcomans," said he to those around him; "there they sit, so heavy, so stupid, that although they know the Shah with his army is coming against them, they will not stir. That they stir not for Shir Khan, so be it, although he has once made them eat dirt; yet, perhaps they like it, and may come again. The

unclean beast, 'tis said, returns to garbage with more relish than to any other food. *Inshallah!* they will know that Shir Khan is not like other men; that when he comes it is not to put the finger of delay into the mouth of astonishment! We will see by what account they reckon."

His impatience to perform some feat worthy of the Shah's approbation was such, that he determined immediately to attack the entrance of the defile. Zohrab, who from a height saw that there was a stir and a gathering among the enemy, prepared to receive them; and when they came on he placed himself in the trench, and by his presence inspired such confidence in the Tuffenkchis, who, unawed by the dense body of invaders, remained firm, firing their matchlock guns with so much steadiness, that no horseman was rash enough to advance the lengths to which his commander wished to impel him. And when at length the infantry came to the aid of Shir Khan, nothing was produced save a continued and ineffective discharge of musketry.

At length the near approach of the Shah in person was announced. Troops, cavalry, and infantry poured in every direction, and all the pomp and circumstance of war became manifest. Shir Khan lost no time in presenting himself to the monarch, and met him when he was still on the road. He dismounted, and stood by the road side; when, the King being near, he approached and kissed his stirrup; whilst in anxiety to learn how matters stood, the impatient Shah curbed his steed and spoke thus—"Has nothing been done? Are the dogs' fathers still there?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said Shir Khan, your slave has attacked them both with cavalry and infantry; and, *mashallah!* Gholams and Tuffenkchis have done what lions would not dare to do, your slave heading them; but the destiny which supports the ass supports them. They will not go."

"Increase the troops, and let a general *yurish*, a charge, be made. We will also go, by the grace of Allah! and let us see whose destiny will prevail."

Immediate orders were issued accordingly; and every cavalier present, aided by every Tuffenkchi, were called upon to add to the assembled mass.

In the meanwhile, Zohrab had not been inactive, and calling the Blind Lion to him said, "By the blood of the Guklan, and by the beard of Zaul Khan, let every man who has a heart be in readiness. There is nothing like a first impression. Should we beat off the Shah and his troops, we may hold our heads up for the rest of the campaign; and my father, my home, and my country may be inspired with confidence; let us be firm of heart, and Allah be with us! Upon this they made the best disposal of their forces they were able, stationed small bodies where it was likely the enemy might attempt to take the defile from above, and then threw themselves into the foremost trench to direct and animate the troops in the first onset.

The rush that ensued from the Persians was awful, and in every way calculated to appal a passive enemy. The yells of *ya Allah* and *ya Ali*,* which issued from every mouth as the mass advanced, rang in the air, and resounded in repeated echoes through the close and intricate windings of the defile, which might have made those who were strangers to the place suppose that the enemy were already within its sides. But protected by the mounds of the trench, the usual tenacity of orientals fighting behind fortifications did not desert the Astabadis and Turcomans on this occasion. They directed their fire with a cool and unerring aim—many Persians fell—others who had received an impulse too great to be immediately checked, were born forward with violence to the very foot of the trench, or even carried over it, and taken prisoners; but the result was a total failure; the mass turned round and fled; whilst a brisk fire hastened their steps. No efforts, even those of the Shah who had thrown himself amongst them, could rally them. His quick eye saw that it would be useless to renew the attack with his present force, and that artillery alone could dislodge the enemy. Accordingly he despatched a messenger with peremptory orders to the commander of the guns, to advance without loss of time, and if he found impediments of road, to enforce a *levée en masse*

* It is suggested, whether the word yell may not have its origin in the mussulman war cry—*ya Allah*, or *y Allah*.

of the peasantry, in order that the guns might be conveyed without intermission of day or night on men's backs.

This was effected, and the three pieces of artillery, to the delight of the army, were shortly after heard rolling over the unpractised roads. The sounds were heard by Zohrab also, whose vigilance was like that of the hawk perched on a rock of observation, and they were sounds which told him that further resistance was vain. He knew the moral effect which even the neighbourhood of such like instruments of war would produce upon his troops; and that they would not oppose for a moment the *Atesh Khané* the fire-house of the Shah, esteeming it a monster even more destructive than the *Divi Sefid*, the White Devil, that fabulous monster of their woods. Accordingly, he determined to withdraw his troops during the night, being persuaded that the consequences of a retreat in good order were less disastrous than those of a defeat, and its consequent disorder. With every precaution he effected his object in so quiet a manner that no one in the enemy's quarters had the least suspicion of the movement. He moreover lighted fires, and stuck a few caps on such parts of the trench which might meet the eye of the enemy, by which means he lulled every suspicion of his retreat.

The placing of these deceptive caps was a source of great amusement to the old Turcoman chief, the Blind Lion; for he was aware that Shir Khan, his former *mehmandar*, commanded the advance, and being accustomed to connect ridicule with his image, so entirely had his effeminate finery and affected manners been despised by himself and his countrymen, that he hoped to see him duped by this trick. And he was not deceived, for still desirous of exhibiting his prowess before the whole army, the arrogant Persian gained permission of the Shah to make one more essay to take the trench by storm, in order that the cannon should not have the sole merit of success.

Daylight had dawned—the sun was preparing to rise—the caps were seen—the whole of the army were made aware of the feat about to be performed, and the Shah was mounted to encourage the enterprise by his presence.

Shir Khan, at the head of five hundred picked Gholams, was early in the field. With his eyes directed towards the deserted trenches, and apostrophizing the unconscious caps, he said, "Now we will see, ye men with burnt fathers! before whom ye stand; Shir Khan, after all, is something in the world." Upon which, sword in hand, he impelled his horse forward, followed by his troops; and hoping, from the early hour of the day, that the enemy was not prepared for their reception; he charged with impetuosity to the very foot of the mound, when meeting with no resistance, he and his men continued their mad career over it, and at that identical moment the sun's first rays glancing upon the spot, to their rage and shame they found themselves opposed to about a dozen of empty caps.

The feelings of the Khan may perhaps be imagined from the character which we have endeavoured to give of him—he could scarcely look up for vexation. Had no vain boasting escaped from his mouth ere he undertook the attack, nothing would have been said; it was boldly intended and boldly performed; but the result was highly relished by those who were envious of the favours conferred upon him by the Shah, and there was no end to the sarcasms and taunts which rang through the army at his expense. "*Mashallah!*" said one, "he performed that feat bravely, not like other men!" "*Belli*, yes," said another, if his head has remained without a cap he has found plenty to pick and choose from." "After all," said the chief executioner, the most notorious coward in the army, "why does the Shah send such a *foozool*,* such a *chowrowchi*,† on his forlorn hopes, when he has such servants as I in his pay?"

The Shah himself was greatly amused at the result of Shir Khan's act of self-devotion, and could not forbear chuckling and sneering over its result; but at the same time he was delighted at his own sagacity in calling up the artillery, which merely, by the fear they inspired, had cleared all obstacles, and opened the way of the defile to his army. He had too much tact to damp the ardour of one who was really brave by unnecessary

* An over officious person.

† A boaster. A talker overmuch.

taunts, yet still he could not resist saying, when he came before him to give an account of his morning's operation, "*Mashallah*, Shir Khan, your face has been made white by a black cap."

"Let the king condescend to employ his slave again," said the Khan, "and, please Allah! he will lay plenty of such caps at the foot of the throne, with this difference, that they will have heads in them!"

"*Inshallah, inshallah!*" exclaimed the Shah, and orders were immediately given him to pursue the enemy with all haste, whilst the whole army made preparations to follow.

Zohrab, in withdrawing his troops from the defence of the defile, had come to the conclusion, that it would be impossible to make any stand against the king's army, either in the mountains or on the causeway, if the artillery were again brought forward to clear the way. The next stronghold would be found in passes through certain rocks, of such angular and precipitate forms, looking like trunks and chests, that the name of *Sandûk*, or trunk, was given to the whole mountain. There was no other descent on this side, from the table land of Persia to the low countries of Manzaderan and Asterabad and the level of the Caspian, and both the armies, offensive and defensive, were obliged to adopt it, with this difference, that the latter had all the advantage of local knowledge, whilst the former was left entirely at the mercy of guides. The descent of the *Sandûk* was not confined to one pass alone, but to a succession, formed by rocks kept so slippery by the never-ceasing fogs and rains of the forests, that it was difficult, even for practised mountaineers, to keep their footing. Their horses and mules, although slipping at every step, from long habit knew how to dispose of their feet in the treacherous rocks; but to strangers it became a service of danger, particularly to the spirited horses of Persia, and therefore the rider in his own defence was obliged to dismount and lead his horse. If such were the difficulties for man and beast, they were almost insuperable for artillery; and it was in the contemplation of those difficulties that Zohrab determined to seize a fitting opportunity, when the guns would be embarrassed in one of the most dangerous passes, to make a

desperate effort to effect their destruction. He therefore proposed a scheme to his companion the Blind Lion, to dispose of troops in ambush, allow the main body of the Shah's troops to pass, then to await the arrival of the artillery, which generally followed in the rear, and at a concerted signal to rush forth and destroy them. The old Turcoman was delighted at the sagacity of his young commander, and as this sort of hide and seek warfare, was the mode of fighting to which he and his men were most accustomed, it met with his fullest approbation. At the same time they determined to leave sufficient men in the defiles by way of blinds, in order to exhibit occasional resistance and retreat. Upon this they took up a position in a secluded dell, where they caused their men to dismount, enjoining a strict silence, which they were in the habit of observing, whilst their steeds ready saddled were permitted to graze until the signal was given.

In due time, Shir Khan and his advance appeared and passed on, meeting with such well-disguised resistance as to call forth his bravery, and such well-conducted retreats as to keep up in freshness and vigour all the luxuriance of his vanity. "Did not I say," he would frequently repeat to his officers in attendance, "that the name of Shir Khan is after all something in Asterabad, and that there is no mother-defiled dog among them who will dare to stop his way. Sandûk, Sandûk ! indeed, they talk of their Sandûk mountain as if it were like the Talisman Hill near Kom, which no one can pass with impunity. *Bah, bah*, Shir Khan laughs at the beard of all the fathers of talismans ! He goes over mountains, not like other men ; he has his own mode of going over mountains !" This was said as his horse and those of his followers were floundering over the rocks, whilst occasional shots from the Asterabad fusileers would stop their career, and blanch their cheeks with apprehension. He was delighted to find himself supported by the main body of the army, which followed one long disjointed file, which Zohrab hoped he might be able effectually to stop, at a still distant pass, even after the destruction of the guns.

With intense anxiety did our hero keep post upon an overhanging rock, where, though unseen himself, he could distinctly see all that passed, his principal attendant

being the young and faithful Ali, who followed his steps with all the watchfulness of a spaniel. Every officer, almost every man in the king's army were known to them in person, and according to the post which they held in the line, they could form some pretty accurate conclusion how much of the army had actually filed off, and how long an interval might still elapse ere the moment for action would arrive. Their personal feelings were strongly excited, as they saw those appear who awoke in their breasts sentiments either of affection or disapprobation. They had seen the chief executioner go by, and then indeed a thousand recollections arose which gave Zohrab many a bitter pang, and which caused Ali to look up into his master's face and grasp his gun, as if he would say, "Shall I repay him by a shot, for his atrocious conduct to you?" He saw no responsive look, and therefore remained quiet; but shortly after, when the Shah in person appeared, whose quick and suspicious eye peering through every crevice, inspecting every tree, and examining every angle, lest it might conceal a hidden enemy; whose malignant countenance apparently established into inflexibility, preparatory to the vengeance which he was about to take upon the city and people of his abhorrence, the animated youth at this sight could no longer refrain from eagerly exclaiming: "There he is—shall I kill him?" at the same time suiting the action to the word, and levelling his musket at his victim. "Hold," cried Zohrab, equally strongly excited by the temptation, "be quiet, his time is not yet come. Allah forgive him—let us not be murderers—let him pass, Ali—down, down—or he sees us."

The moment of vengeance elapsed, and one of serious meditation succeeded. Zohrab was lost in a thousand reflections upon the sight of the being whose life he had just spared. His own persecutor, the murderer of his Amima, the invader of his country, the announced murderer of himself, his father, mother, and family; the proclaimed shedder of the blood of thousands of innocent people. All this had gone by, and he had refrained from taking vengeance into his own hand. The Mussulman youth felt that such destinies were to be wielded by the hand of an allwise Providence, and not placed at the disposal of

a weak and erring mortal such as himself. His thoughts took another direction, when he saw the iniquitous hump-back appear with whom he would willingly have conferred, in furtherance of future plans for the protection of his country ; but he was more afraid of his searching and suspicious eye than that of any other individual in the army, and therefore effectually screened himself and his attendant by the projection of the rock.

The army had now disappeared, and not long after succeeded indications of the approach of the artillery, by the arrival of bodies of peasantry to prepare the road. No labour, however, but that of thousands, and that for a long continuance, could overcome such rocks as those which intersected their paths, and therefore the ponderous instruments could only proceed by the united efforts of the peasants who carried them, and if so, their destruction was certain. At length the moment arrived. Zohrab's heart beat audibly as the sounds of the approaching artillery caught his ear. "Ali," said he, "steal through the grass, seek out the Blind Lion, tell him to prepare his men, let them come on with every possible precaution to yonder thicket, the shouting of the peasantry will drown our noise ; and when he hears me fire, let him advance and lay on, in the name of the Prophet !"

This was no sooner said than done. Zohrab had secured a band of fusileers, with their matchlocks in readiness, and these he called to him. When the guns were in sight, and the peasants who bore them were tottering under the burthen, slipping over the wet rocks, and not very well protected by armed men, he ordered a discharge to be fired over their heads. The suddenness of the attack took them so exceedingly by surprise, that unanimously they let their burthens drop, and without once looking behind they gave way to their fears and fled. Immediately Zohrab and his matchlock men, followed up the Blind Lion and his cavalry, fell upon the Persian officers in charge of the artillery, and put them to flight.

They then immediately proceeded to spike the guns, a work of no great difficulty ; and kindling a fire, they soon had the satisfaction of seeing the carriages, and the accompanying tumbrils, on fire, whilst tremendous explo-

sions of gunpowder rang through the woods, and announced the catastrophe but too soon and too intelligibly to the ears of the deceived and indignant Shah.

No scheme ever so entirely succeeded. The destruction of those engines, which must inevitably have caused the destruction of his city, and with it of his home and family, infused a joy into the heart of the gallant and sagacious Zohrab, which amply made up for the anxieties he had endured.

There was a descent distinct from the Sandûk pass, but so singularly intricate and difficult, that none of the natives, excepting upon urgent occasions, undertook to go through it. To this, Zohrab directed his troops, determining to hasten onwards, in order to head the Shah's army, and impede its further progress.

When the king heard the explosions of the tumbrils, the truth of what had taken place immediately flashed across his mind. First one explosion was heard, then a second, then a third. The whole army seemed paralysed by the noise, which reverberated through the woods in prolonged echoes, and made the disaster appear doubly terrible. Impressed with the extraordinary powers of Zaul Khan, they conceived that he had set to work some infernal agency, and that the fabulous beings which with vulgar report had peopled the forests, were already beginning the work of destruction. Too soon, however, was the truth confirmed, by the report of a horseman who had escaped from the disaster. The account which he gave of the attack, and the destruction which ensued, made his hearers believe that it was effected by supernatural beings, who of a sudden appeared, and in profound silence seemed to be animated with one spirit, knowing what steps to pursue, as if spiking guns, burning gun-carriages, and blowing up tumbrils, were their daily occupation; and who, after they had completed the mischief, disappeared as if by magic.

The Shah's anger was entirely roused by this blow; the more so as he felt that he had not taken those precautions for the safety of his artillery, which his knowledge of the country he had to pass through, and of the people he had to contend with, ought to have suggested. He would have wreaked his vengeance upon their com-

mander, but he was reckoned amongst the slain, having fallen bravely in defending his trust. He suspected that so well concerted a plan of surprise could not have been conducted without some treachery among his own officers; he became distrustful of every one—symptoms of his dangerous and uncontrollable passion were apparent—and those who knew him well, began to fear that the most disastrous and tragic fate awaited Asterabad and its inhabitants.

But far from being dispirited, his determination only rose with the defeat. He immediately despatched orders to Tehran, to forward more guns and a reinforcement of troops—he sent a summons to the city to surrender before his approach, or else the general massacre so often threatened would be enforced.

He succeeded in gaining possession of the mountain passes, to the level of the flat country, by pushing forward a succession of troops; and as there was no defile of sufficient strength to impede the march of the army, the utmost which Zohrab could do was to harrass its progress by every means of annoyance in his power. The Shah himself took up a position upon an overhanging ledge of rock, situated at some distance upon the declivity of the mountain, which commanded a magnificent and extensive view, giving him at one glance the extent of the conquest which it was his object to achieve. The dense forest scenery of the mountain was darkly shaded by a constantly clouded atmosphere; and as heavy outlines of the larger trees receded from him, they gradually subsided into one compact mass of foliage, only broken here and there by the elevation of some giant tree of the forest above the rest. At a great distance, just perceptible, could be traced the cupolas of Asterabad; beyond, in the indentations of the low coast, might be defined its small harbour, whilst the broad sheet of the Caspian sea, bounded by a line of horizon as unvaried as the ocean, presented the same image of sublimity to the eye. Far to the eastward, the immense plains of Kipchak blended their evanescent tints with the sky, and untenanted by cities and fixed habitations, spoke to the imagination of those wandering and pastoral tribes, which, like the patriarchs of old, lived upon their

flocks and herds, and in whose simple manners might be learnt all that philosophy could teach of the primitive destiny of man. These were the Turcoman tribes, who were divided and sub-divided into small communities without number, and which extended themselves far to the confines of Tartary.

The contemplation of such scenes would perhaps have softened the heart of any mortal but the Shah; but he could think of nothing save what was suggested to his mind by his own vile passions. Instead of reflecting how greatly he might be the benefactor of his fellow-creatures, he could only devise schemes for promoting their misery or destruction. Like the sanguinary condor, who, from some rocky eminence, is ever on the watch for prey, glancing his animate and ferocious eye in search of a victim—his powerful talons longing to tear—his beak to destroy :—so sat this bloody Shah—thirsting for blood—and only thinking the time too short ere he counted the slain that would be placed before him, as he sat at his sanguinary feast before the devoted Asterabad.

CHAPTER XIII.

A despot, though he will slay his hundreds unjustly, will sometimes by mistake strike in the right place.

CONVERSATION WITH A TURK.

Zohrab's efforts to restrain the King's army from descending into the plain were fruitless; and he now saw that, without having recourse to stratagem, it would be in vain to give any check of consequence to their career. There was one spot in the jungle, only known to himself and his Turcoman companions in arms, so intricate in its ways, so surrounded by the thickest and almost impenetrable masses of vegetation, that when once within it, it became difficult to leave it; and he conceived the project of drawing the whole army within its mazes, and then

attacking it at all points. To effect this, he determined to have recourse again to the agency of the humpback; he knew the resources of that man's invention; how plausibly he could show why the army should march one way in preference to another, and how easy it might be for him possessing a constant avenue to the king's ear, to shape his decisions to his views, without himself appearing to be their promoter. Accordingly Zohrab lost no time in writing the proper letter, opening to the avaricious mind of the traitor, such views of future wealth, as well as whetting his appetite for it by a present taste, that he hoped some advantage might be reaped, although he did not allow himself to be too sanguine in his expectations, or his prudence to be set asleep by too eager an anticipation of success. Again he entrusted this mission to the faithful Ali, who accepted it with joy; for his judgment having acquired much solidity during the recent scenes in which he had been engaged, and directed as it had been by the master-mind of his chief, he felt sufficient confidence in himself, that he could perform his task with success. Accordingly, he divested himself of the dress of a soldier, and adopted the simple costume of an Asterabadi woodsman, which consists of little more than a shirt and pair of drawers and a cap, besides the small hatchet which is inserted in his girdle. This dress, in the warm, close, and sluggish atmosphere of the borders of the Caspian, is enough for the wants of the common people, whose wan and anguish looks, speak at once the constant war they have to wage against climate.

He quitted his master in the full hope of soon returning to him as successfully as he did from his first mission, and having carefully secured the letter within the folds of his cap, he dived into the forest, taking his direction towards the station occupied by the Shah. As he approached it, he heard the hum of his troops among the trees, the neighing of the horses, and the constant wranglings that are inseparable with any congregation of Persians. He approached them with caution; he prowled about, in order to discover how he could most easily approach the immediate resting-place of the Shah, because there he would be certain to find the humpback, and *accordingly* he determined to ascend higher on the moun-

tain than the royal position, and having made his survey to act accordingly. He had acquired all the activity and sure-footedness of a mountain goat, from practice both in his earlier days as a hawksman's son, and in his later, as an Asterabadi woodman, therefore it did not require much effort to clamber over the rocky points, and to perch himself on some elevated spot, where he might observe what was going on below. Not far distant from the main position of the Shah, marked by his crimson travelling pavillion, he discovered a small white tent secluded among a thick mass of trees, which he supposed might belong to the humpback, and thither he determined to direct his steps. With all proper caution, he picked his way through the wood, and little by little, had approached sufficiently near to discern who its inhabitants might be. He waited for a considerable time, still no one appeared. There was a *meshek*, or water sack suspended on its tripod, and some cooking utensils; at length at a short distance, on a projecting rock, though not much higher than the trees, he discovered, not the humpback, nor a sentinel on guard, but a woman in a dark and unobscured veil.

The day was drawing to a close; Ali was perplexed what to do; he felt inclined to address the woman, who would inform him where the humpback was to be found, still he had misgivings that in so doing he might fall into difficulty; for women he knew were creatures of impulse, and a cry of alarm from a female voice, he knew might make itself heard from afar, and he might be seized. However all things considered, he determined to approach her, whoever she might be, and endeavour to interest her in his behalf. This he did not venture to do at once and by surprise, but when within hearing distance, he began to exercise his axe upon the root of a tree, a habit natural to a Mazanderan peasant, and at the same time sang an air common to the Persians. These sounds attracted the woman's attention, who turning towards him, in a tone of encouragement, asked him who he was, and whence he came?

Ali, pleased with his success, answered, "I am a poor lad, sent by a sick mother to seek a doctor. As ye be a true believer, tell me, where lives a certain *Goozoo*, who is said to perform marvellous cures?"

Zulma, for she it was, having approached the youth, with that quickness of apprehension for which she was famous, at first glance discovered that it was Ali himself, and without betraying the smallest emotion, the true object of his coming at once revealed itself to her mind. She did not allow him to perceive that she disbelieved his story. On the contrary, she encouraged him to think that she espoused his interests, and with dexterity led him on to give her his confidence, enchanting him by the softness of her voice, and the fascination of her manner. His youthful blood was in a ferment at a reception so flattering from one so charming, for although she studiously avoided shewing her face, yet she so advantageously put forth all her arts, that she had secured his admiration before he knew whether he stood upon heaven or earth. Gradually she drew him from the rock, towards her tent; he willingly followed, still adhering to his first story of a sick mother. When they had reached it, he found another woman within the tent, a maiden whom Zulma had brought with her as her servant and guide.

"By your soul now," said she to Ali, "describe the ailments of your mother; for we, by the blessings of Allah, are skilled in medicine, and perhaps may stand in lieu of the *Goozoo*."

"As I am your slave," said the youth, "we also have women practitioners in our village, and my mother too knows much of simples, but it is not that we want; it is the skill of man, and of this man, who is said to be equal to *Galenus* himself."

"In truth," said Zulma, "he is all that, and a great deal more. Although his back be crooked, he has the straightest head of any man in Irân, and, as you have probably heard, can tell you what your mother requires, as well from this mountain, as if he were by her bedside; but I am his scholar; he has taught me his art, and when you speak to me, you speak to him. What do you want more?"

"I should want nothing more," said Ali, "if it depended upon your slave, and a talisman written by your hand would not only cure his body, but make his soul touch the skies; but (he speaks with respect,) he fears that his *mother the woman* would not be so satisfied."

Zulma finding him too wary to be driven out of his story, burnt with curiosity to know what could be the object of his errand, certain in her mind that he was despatched by Zohrab. She determined to ascertain this, even should she be obliged to use force, denounce him to the Shah, and extract from him the object of his visit.

Then turning to Ali, she said, "It will be difficult to find the Goozoo, and should you go among the troops you will be seized and ill-treated. Stay here, and I will send for him. Upon which she whispered a few words to her maid, who wrapping herself up in her veil, left the tent, whilst Zulma continued to throw the net of her fascination over him. She led him on to talk of Asterabad, and he had begun to give some account of their mutual idol Zohrab, when three ferashes, the strongest and most powerful of their kind, rushed in and seized upon the unsuspecting Ali. To throw him down, to tie his hands behind his back, and to secure his person, was but the business of a few seconds; and when this was done Zulma said to him with the same kind manner—"And so, Ali, your mother is sick, and you want a talisman. Boy, you may have deceived us once, but do not hope it a second time. Now tell me what is your business with the humpback? Speak the truth and not a hair of your head shall be touched! Delay but for an instant, and you die!"

The perplexed youth was not sufficiently well versed in the arts of deceit to have a story ready prepared for this exigency, and his presence of mind having forsaken him, he became lost in apprehension, and could think of nothing but of the anxieties which his master would feel. This was his first failure, and he felt it like a boy—he gave way to tears and despondency. But, notwithstanding this, the delivering up of the letter was the last of his thoughts, and he stoutly denied the possession of any such document. Zulma, however, was neither to be deceived by his words, nor softened by his lamentations. She ordered the ferashes to search their prisoner's person, and, sure enough, in the folds of his cap (a well-known hiding-place in every Persian's person) they found Zohrab's letter. Ali, but for his bonds, would have seized upon and torn it into a thousand pieces, but Zulma's

eagerness to gain possession of it, told him how hopeless would be his entreaties that it might be restored to him. She immediately opened and read it. One skilful in physiognomy ought to have been there, to watch the workings of her features as she perused the interesting paper—to have witnessed her abhorrence at the treachery of the humpback—her malignant joy at having him now so completely in her power—and her determination to give the reins to her feelings of revenge against him.

"*Mashallah!*" said she, in sarcastic exultation, "a wonderful good servant has the Shah in this imp without a saint. Thanks to him and thy master, young man! the Shah and his empire might be lost through their treachery. Let us go, in the name of Allah! before the Shah let us go—a moment's delay were sin. Bring forward your prisoner," said the energetic maiden to the ferashes, "I myself will go, happen what will. Better that one suffer than thousands should be in jeopardy." Upon this, covering herself with her veil, the importance of her errand surmounting all prejudices, she hastened onward with great resolution of manner and dignity of demeanour, followed by Ali and the ferashes.

The assembled camp were surprised at seeing a woman, considering how strict had been the orders against the appearance of females. Zulma had taken such precautions in the performance of her journeys, travelling at night, and hiding herself quite in the skirts of the encampments during the day, that none but her father, the humpback, and a few others knew of her being in the camp. But now the urgency of the case impelled her forward; with her natural impetuosity, and her desire of acting differently from her sex in general, she bade defiance to reproach, and with a determined step made her way good to where the Shah himself was seated in person.

The sun was on the point of setting—the Shah was about to make his evening devotions, and a solemn silence reigned in the neighbourhood of his pavillion, when his ears caught the sounds of conflicting voices; among which, to his surprise, he thought he heard a woman's. He listened again, and still the same sounds struck his ear; but his doubts were soon satisfied, by perceiving a fe-

male rush forward, resisting those of the attending officers who wished to stop her, and making straight to the Shah.

"What does this mean?" he roared out with a voice of thunder. "What means this woman?"

"As I am your slave," exclaimed Zulma, excited to the utmost by the step she had just taken, "I have a petition to the king of kings."

The attendants would have dragged her off; but the Shah, struck by her manner and appearance, and altogether by the singularity of the circumstance, ordered them to desist, and said, "Woman, do you know that it is death for you to be found here."

"As I am your sacrifice, of that your slave is aware," said the undaunted maiden. "Kill me, but first hear. The Shah's life is in danger."

"How?" said the king, in utter surprise.

"Yes, yes," said Zulma: "may Allah destroy me if I lie! Here, here is a letter which will explain all."

The Shah held out his hand to receive it, upon which hastening forward she delivered it, although against every etiquette, and then kissed his knee and the hem of his garment.

These actions were not displeasing to the Shah, for when she approached him she artfully dropped her veil, and in so doing had exhibited to his view those beaming and animated charms for which she was so celebrated. He was too much interested, however, in the contents of the letter, to think for the moment upon any thing else, and when he had read it the fire of rage and astonishment broke out upon his expressive features.

"Who and what are you, O woman?" said the king, "that you bring me this letter. Who is it from? Who is it to? Explain—my head goes round with perplexity."

Zulma having had time to collect her thoughts, and from the absence of danger to herself to take courage, thus spoke, "Your humble slave is Zulma the daughter of Zerb Ali, your Majesty's chief executioner."

"Is it so indeed?" said the Shah; "you are that Zulma!"

"As I am your sacrifice, your slave is less than the least, and although the royal commands were issued for no women to follow the camp, yet what can your slave say? She is not like other women, she felt that she might be useful in attending the sick; and she came; she felt, if the humpback went, she might—"

"There is no harm done, Zulma," said the Shah, softened; "but what of the letter?"

"Let the Shah give ear to his slave, and he will know all. Whatever she asserts, she will prove; she trusts to her own veracity, and to the justice of the king of kings, and requires nothing more to be believed. She swears neither by the Shah's head, nor by her father's soul, for all she has to say is the truth."

"Speak on," said the king.

Your slave was at Firouzabad. Destiny had ordained one day, as she sat in the humpback's tent, that a youth with cautious step opened the door, whom she recognized to be Ali, a youth, servant to the hostage Zohrab Khan, both of whom your slave had frequently seen in her father's house. Your slave immediately retired, but surprised at the appearance of this youth she lent an attentive ear to what passed. He said that he came from Asterabad, and that he had a letter for the humpback: which he delivered and departed. The humpback and your slave are friends, and our thoughts are in common; your slave requested to know the contents of the letter: he refused. Your slave insisted again and again, and as often did he refuse; and whatever she might think of his conduct it remained a complete mystery to her until this very hour. She has now discovered all. The same youth Ali, by the blessing of Allah, has fallen into her hands. He refused to speak his errand, by force she seized the letter from him; Allah, Allah! can the king of kings doubt to whom the letter is addressed! Heaven preserve the Shah! Thanks to Allah, that your humble slave, who is the least of the less, should have been favoured by *takdeer* in discovering this treachery."

Ali, between his two guardians, stood at a small distance, the picture of woe, but still with sufficient *elf-possession* to take a good survey of the scene before

him, and to ascertain the chances in favour of his escape. His arms were pinioned behind his back, but his legs were free.

The Shah sat for some time wrapt in thought. At length he exclaimed, "Bring hither the youth, and send for the humpback!" and looking upward to the summit of an enormous pine tree, which had been struck by lightning, he said, "and bid one of the executioner's gang be in readiness at hand with a rope." An awful fear ran through the bystanders as they heard these words, strongly enhanced by the wildness of the scenery around them. There sat the king, coiled up as it were in the folds of his power, like the dragon of the wilderness spreading terror around; above him reared the towering stem of the pine, scathed and blackened, overtopping all the trees of the forest, stretching out its burnt and withered branches in stiff and rigid outlines, and presenting no bad emblem of the withered person of the Shah himself.

"And who are you, said the Shah to Ali: "what business have you here?"

"I am the son of the Shah's late chief huntsman," said the youth with confidence.

"*Ahi!* said the Shah, apparently having heard enough from him, to wish for more information. "Let him stand back," said the king in slow words, as if he had received an unexpected blow, still looking at the lad with a mixed expression of regret and anger. "And you, Zulma Begum," added he, "stand away also; we will speak to you afterwards. Where is the humpback?" he roared out with a voice full of dangerous import.

He had not waited long ere the culprit appeared, making prostrations with his wonted ease, but rather perplexed at the suddenness of the call, and much more surprised at seeing the number of people collected at so unusual an hour.

"Stand forth!" said the Shah.

These words, uttered with a solemn voice, made the traitor's heart sink within him: and as he stood alone, and disengaged from the rest of the crowd, he made his lowest inclination.

"Hear the words of the king: listen to his question, and answer as you hope for salvation. There was once a dog; a dog, mangy, ill-savoured, and of broken fortunes; the refuse of its species; despised by men, avoided by other beasts; one man only in the world felt compassion for its sufferings; he took it in, fed it, cherished it, placed every confidence in it; made it the guardian of his house, and the companion of his hours. Long did this go on, disinterested kindness on the one hand, apparent undeviating fidelity on the other; when one day, for a piece of dainty meat, not a bit more dainty than what it got at home, did the ungrateful beast betray his benefactor's trust. What ought to be done to such a beast? speak, O man! speak."

The humpback's fears were excited to such a degree that he could scarcely utter: he looked with a supplicating face around, to see if he could discover a friendly countenance—the whole scene was that of ominous despair.

"Speak!" said the Shah in a voice of thunder.

"As I am your sacrifice," said the wretched man, "your slave knows nothing. He has fallen from the clouds. Whatever the Shah ordains is right."

"Art thou that dog?" said the Shah; speak, yes or no?"

"What does your slave know? He is less than a dog, or even the meanest reptile that crawls, before the face of the asylum of the universe; but, as Allah is in Heaven, as Mahomed the blessed is his prophet, and as Mohamed Shah is the shadow of God upon earth, your slave has done nought save to pray daily for the happiness and prosperity of the sovereign of Irân.

"So is it?" said the Shah, with a most incredulous face.

"As I am less than the least, it is," answered the humpback, stroking his beard and face down into as open an expression as possible.

"What does this mean?" said the Shah, holding the letter out to him.

The humpback looked at it with astonishment, and having read it, delivered it back to the Shah, saying, "*as I am your slave, its contents are totally unknown to me.*"

"But," said the Shah, "it begins by allusions to the affair of the guns—knowest thou aught of that? There is treachery in that."

"What guns! what treachery!" exclaimed the humpback, with the greatest affectation of innocence, "Your slave knows nothing—kill him, take off his head; but he is as ignorant of this matter as the child unborn."

Just at this moment Zulma, who had been intensely attentive to the whole scene, no longer able to restrain her impatience, broke through all propriety, and pushing through the crowd, stood before the king, exclaiming to the culprit! "Thou knowest nothing, sayest thou, liar! Who saw thee receive a letter at Firouzabad through the hands of Ali? Was it not I? And is it not Ali who has also brought this?"

Upon this the Shah ordered the youth to be brought forward, and to the barber's dismay, there he stood indeed an unwilling spectator of this strange scene.

Still the humpback, who by this time had recovered the use of his senses, seeing no positive proof alleged against him, again stoutly denied being in any manner a party concerned in the letter. During this examination he appeared uneasy in his person; and against all etiquette, which enjoins a respectful position and a steady attitude, his hands were continually wandering towards that part of his dress where a small pocket is placed, and where secret papers are usually carried. This uneasiness became more conspicuous at seeing Ali, when the Shah, whose suspicions were easily roused, said to the ferashes, "Search him! whatever is found in his pockets bring to our presence."

Upon hearing this, the poor wretch broke out into a cold sweat, his knees knocked under him, and he could say nothing but "*cheezi nist*," there is nothing. However, in the very pocket, where he had first deposited it, there was found among other papers the original note which he had received from Zohrab.

No sooner had the Shah read it, than without saying another word, and with an ominous fierceness of manner, he pointed upward to the withered pine-tree, and straightway an executioner's officer was seen ascending with a

rope to throw over its highest branch, whilst others seized with ruthless hand upon the condemned traitor.

One must have heard them to conceive the piercing cries that issued from that small body. As soon as he perceived the fate that awaited him, he gave utterance to the most heart-rending lamentations. He threw himself upon the ground before the Shah, in attitudes the most abject; he begged for life, as if it were sweeter to him than to any one else; he entreated Zulma, the *ferashes*, Ali, any one and every one around, to intercede for him; in short, so miserable a spectacle of human woe and human weakness was scarcely ever seen. But all would not do. When every thing was ready, and the rope about his neck, at a signal from the king, the ill-fated man was drawn up with the rapidity of lightning to the highest branch, and there he swung to and fro, a future feast to the vultures, and an intended beacon to the enemy, warning him not to trust for the future to a traitor's interference.

The whole scene was full of awe, and as the blast swept through the forest glades, and agitated the tops of the highest trees, the withered branches of the pine-tree creaked, and as it were moaned over the forsaken corpse which they bore. The uplifted faces of the assembled crowd, looking their last at the well-known form of the creature who not an hour before had been their dread; the stern figure of the King, and the silence which reigned, altogether produced a solemn and impressive effect.

The Shah then said, "Where is the youth Ali?" A feeling of commiseration arose in the breasts of the king's servants, at the fate which was likely to await him, for he was known to them, and an universal favourite; but, to the astonishment and dismay of the two *ferashes* into whose charge he had been placed, on looking round, instead a human creature as they expected, they only found a shirt. It seems that the intelligent youth had not for a moment forgot his own situation during the interest produced by the execution of the humpback, and taking advantage of the fixed attention of his guardians, with great dexterity he unloosed the bandage which confined his wrists, slipped out of his shirt, and standing as they did on the brink

of a precipice, he stole down it with the greatest caution, and plunging at once into the thick wood which surrounded them, he escaped, and at the moment unnoticed.

The Shah overlooked the negligence of the ferashes, for it had not been his intention to put the boy to death; but they escaped miraculously, and therefore received the congratulations of their friends. On any other occasion death must have been their fate; but in the centre of the woods, suspicious of all, and fearful of too much raising a feeling of disgust in his attendants against himself, he for the present smothered his anger, and dismissed those who had assembled. But Zulma still stood before him.

CHAPTER XIV.

Then all was well until a traitor came, when all went ill.
PERSIAN HISTORY, *passim*.

The Shah, as we have before observed, was struck with the beauty of Zulma. Instead of taking offence at her disobedience of his commands, that circumstance alone, accompanied by the boldness and decision of conduct which she had just exhibited, placed a character before him which in his mind's eye he conceived never could exist among Persian women, and elevated her in his estimation. This probably would never have been the case, had he not ascertained that she was possessed of great beauty, that passport to the heart, and which even in his breast engendered a kindly feeling towards her. Although he scarcely was ever known to change a determination once made, yet he liked to be governed in small things, and was pleased to have some one about him, with whom he might relax his mind by light conversation. Amima had been to him a friend of so superior a character, that he vainly hoped again to possess one like her. Her image occasionally haunted him, and then pangs of remorse and horror would dart through his heart which made him a wretch indeed. Having lost her, he had thrown himself

more than commonly into the hands of the humpback, who was gradually acquiring a great influence over him until the catastrophe which we have just related, took place; and now in the energetic and apparently open character of Zulma he hoped to have discovered one who might fill the place of both. Therefore after the dismissal of his attendants, he called her to him and spoke thus: "Zulma!" he said, "the Shah is eminently pleased with your conduct this day. You have probably prevented the destruction of his army, and eventually saved his life. He is thankful to you. Ask something of him, and he will grant it—by the head of the king he will grant it!"

Zulma was overjoyed to hear these words, for they were the forerunners of that eminence among women, which in her scheme of ambition she had promised herself to attain. Accordingly she knelt down, and kissing the ground, whilst she again exposed her face to the king's gaze, she said, "Your slave is as the dust of the earth before the king of kings. What can she desire when she stands in his presence? What more can she desire than to be allowed to stand before him, and enjoy the protection of his shadow?"

"So be it," said the Shah, "let Zulma for the future walk with her head erect; let her sit on the musnud of honour; let her wear the jika and the kalaat of the king's approbation;" upon which, having dismissed her, he sent for her father, to whom he communicated his wishes, and ordered him to provide her such tents, servants, and equipages as were worthy of a royal banou.

Nothing could exceed the exultation of both father and daughter at the extraordinary turn which had thus suddenly taken place in their fortunes, and it will be understood how rapidly the influence of the ardent and designing Zulma spread itself over the minds and actions of the Shah, by the quick operation of its first efforts. The dastardly executioner was too happy, as it may be imagined, to seize the opportunity of remaining behind in the rapid military operations about to take place, in order to superintend the formation of his daughter's establishment.

On the very next morning the army proceeded on its *descent* into the plain; for the Shah had received the

welcome intelligence from the active Shir Khan, that he had secured every defile, and obtained full possession of the country to the commencement of the great causeway, which opened an easy avenue to the very gates of Asterabad. Accordingly large bodies both of infantry and cavalry were seen making their way after the irregular manner of Asiatics, awakening the solitude of the woods by their shouts, and full of renewed spirits at the hope of soon seeing an end of their fatigue by the possession of the city. In such immense tracts of woodland any deviation from the main body of the army was dangerous, inasmuch as Zohrab's troops infested its flanks, and with persevering activity and boldness did not lose an opportunity of seizing stragglers and making prisoners. Consequently the line of march was as well kept as if the steadiest discipline marshalled their ranks.

The Shah having reached the causeway, took up his station on an open spot in the forest, and called a meeting of his officers, in order to deliberate upon the most effectual mode of attacking the city. It was a question of considerable difficulty considering its position. The jungle nearly enclosed it on every side, therefore, although troops might approach the walls almost unperceived, yet unless assisted by guns, such help could be of little avail; for to attempt to scale the walls without a breach, was a feat to which no Persian troops could be brought, and to make a breach was itself unknown in the tactics of Persia. The gates were the principal objects of attack, and that of Tehran being the most easy of access on the causeway, it was upon that point that the Shah and his captains agreed to commence operations.

Shir Khan had returned from the advanced posts to wait upon the Shah, and he attended the council in addition to the general of the cavalry, to the commander of the *tuffenkchis* and guards, and the chief of the camel artillery. The vizir was also present, as was the chief executioner.

"You, who are acquainted with the fortifications of the Tehran gate," said the Shah to Shir Khan, "speak. Which will be the best mode of attacking it?"

"As I am your sacrifice," answered the Khan, "the dogs' fathers have mounted a gun upon it: of that the

king of kings must not lose sight, because, whatever such a man as I might do, with that gun staring me in the face of what use would my sword be?"

"The grave of the gun's father be defiled," said the king. "It fires once, and then the kizzilbash laughs at it. The gun is nothing. The hand to the sword, and then forward. When once we get to the first gate our numbers will force it down."

"By the head of the Shah," said Ismael Khan, "give your slave order to attack it forthwith with the Gholams, and my soul is your sacrifice if we don't get into the town at the first onset."

"What is cavalry compared to my *tuffenchis*," said the commander of infantry; first we clear the walls with our matchlocks, and then we make a *urish* and having destroyed the gates we enter. Then in the name of Allah, we will slay on till the Shah cries stop."

"*Mashallah!*" said the old Zamburekchi bashi, "as I am an old servant and your sacrifice, are my *zambureks* nothing, that I am to be left with a finger in my mouth? The enemy have got one gun—*mashallah!* we have got a hundred! My camels make our castle, and our guns fire as true as, praise be to God! the eye of the king of kings."

"After all," said the vizir with solemn deliberation, having waited till all had spoken, "as I am your slave, every man's way may be good, but by the salt of the King let us see whether mine be not the best. The centre of the universe will see that his *takdeer*, destiny, will have the upper hand, and that without sword, without artillery, a certain *Skirazi* will come and invite him to walk into the city, in spite of every effort and every resistance which the rebels may make."

"*Inshallah, inshallah!*" was exclaimed by the Shah, and repeated by every one present, when the vizir said,—"The King knows best what is to be done, but let your slave suggest the necessity of first sending a summons to the rebels to surrender; perhaps, by the blessing of the prophet, wisdom may have entered their souls, and they may be crying Aman, Aman, longing to rub their foreheads in the dust, and to seize the King's skirt."

"Well spoken, by the King's head," exclaimed the

Shah ; " quickly let a summons be made. Let the *jarchi bashi*, the herald in chief, proceed to the city, and in the name of the king order it to surrender, or to stand the consequences. Shir Khan," addressing himself to that officer, " go you also—they know you—and make our resolves fully and clearly known to the rebels. Pardon, if they surrender ; a general massacre if they resist."

" By my eyes," said Shir Khan, " by the condescension of the king of kings, they will at length know Shir Khan better than they do our Holy Prophet."

Upon this he departed, taking with him the herald accompanied by the brilliant cortege which attends that officer, and very soon after they were on their road to the Tehran gate of Asterabad. Leaving him for the present we return for a while to Zohrab.

Ali having made a successful escape from his guardians, crawled with difficulty through almost impenetrable masses of wood and thicket to escape the King's troops, and at length succeeded in rejoining his master, who on the other hand had been waiting for him with the greatest anxiety.

The plight in which he appeared spoke his ill success, and Zohrab at once saw there was nothing left for him but to make such a disposition of his troops as might best annoy the invading army, and then rejoin his father in the city. Having given proper directions to the Blind Lion, he speedily returned to Asterabad, accompanied by Ali. The meeting of the father and son bore the same character as their leave-taking ; their energies were the same, their determination of resistance unchanged, and although they had not succeeded in impeding the advance of the Shah, still as he came unattended by artillery, their hopes of ultimate success were great.

Aware how near the invading army had approached, they were prepared at any moment for an attack. Zaul and his son had taken up their head quarters at the Tehran gate of the city, and had loaded the great gun to its very muzzle, with a determination to discharge its contents into the centre of the first body of troops which appeared. They were about so to do, as soon as they perceived Shir Khan and the heralds approaching ; but when it was ascertained that they were not a hostile body,

they waited for their arrival. When Zaul once again saw Shir Khan, he could scarcely refrain from making merry at his expense, considering the different manners and the various characters in which he made his appearance at that very gate.

"Maskallah!" he exclaimed upon seeing him, "your place has long been empty. My eyes are enlightened at the sight of you. Old friends ought not to meet in this manner; but for this once Zaul Khan must shut the gates of hospitality, and refuse the hand of welcome."

Shir Khan, who in truth entertained some latent hope that he might be the means of averting the certain destruction which awaited Zaul, his family and city, called upon him in the most serious manner to reflect upon what he was about to decide. He said, "I am your friend—*wallah billah*—this is no jest. You do not know what the Shah is; he is the father of all misfortune. Let me adjure you, by the soul of Zohrab Khan, to surrender yourself to the Shah's mercy! except in that, you have no hope. After all is he not king of Persia?"

Zaul would not allow himself to be influenced by Shir Khan's words, notwithstanding he was certain that there was truth in his professions of friendship, and that being in the main a man of good heart, and in this instance of fair intentions, he really wished him well. He reposed such confidence in the excellence of his cause, in the staunch support which he would receive from his friends and troops, and in the precautions which he had taken for the defence of his city, that to surrender was the last of his thoughts; and this determination he freely announced to the heralds. "Go," said he, "say we are ready to open our gates, provided we be secure of our independence; but short of that, we will resist until we have no strength left to wield a sword."

Shir Khan continued to exert himself for a long time in his endeavours to dissuade Zaul Khan and his son from their purpose, but unsuccessfully; when losing all patience he said to them, "God take you into his holy keeping. If blood there must be, let it be upon your heads. I wash my hands of it. All I could do, I have done." Upon that he and his party turned their horses' heads in the direction of the king's camp, feeling that

the next communication which took place between them would be through the medium of the destructive engines of war.

As soon as they had delivered their message to the Shah, he ordered that the first attack should be made on the Tehran gate, so early in the morning that it would be difficult for the enemy to make any certain use of their piece of artillery. It was intended to be a simultaneous attack, of horse and foot; a party of men with axes were to cross the ditch, and attempt to batter down the gate, whilst infantry in small bodies disposed here and there, as the ground and wood might protect them, were ordered to keep the walls clear by an incessant discharge of musketry. At the very moment that this decision had been made, a general alarm of an attack was heard in every part of the royal camp—the day was closing, and the noise and confusion which ensued exceeded all description. The indefatigable Zohrab had determined to make one desperate effort without the walls, ere he allowed himself to be enclosed within them, and having collected all the cavalry and infantry which he could muster, he threw himself unawares upon the enemy with the intention of making his way good to the Shah's tent, and seizing his person. Nothing was better planned and more gallantly executed; but with that precaution against surprise which always marked the Shah's generalship, he was on horseback upon the very first alarm, and heading his gholams met the invaders with so determined a resistance, that with every effort of Zohrab's bravery and skill he was obliged to cede to numbers, and return whence he came.

The military operations of Asiatics must not be judged by the standard of Europeans: their attacks are desultory and furious upon the first onset, whilst their retreats are as rapid as the advance has been impetuous. The troops being without discipline, consequently no place is fixed for each individual; the soldier, unsupported by his neighbour, feels that he in his own person is as it were opposed to the whole body of the enemy, and that he must depend upon his own personal prowess for any result that may be produced. Consequently, it is frequently seen that most heroic feats of individual

bravery are performed, whilst the army in the mass has behaved in every way disgracefully.

Zohrab retreated to the city, fully expecting the morning attack, and he was not mistaken. He and his father remained in a state of watchfulness upon the towers of the Tehran gate during the whole night, taking rest by turns, determined upon the first approach of the enemy to put the whole city upon the defensive. An hour before the dawn Zohrab's ear was struck by sounds unusual to the silence of the woods; they consisted of an undefined rustling, like the first approaches of wind, and gradually as they became more distinct it was plain that the expected attack was at hand. Instantly every one was at his post, and ready to act upon the first signal. The moon had just set, and there was no appearance of the dawn, consequently darkness obscured the face of nature.

The advance of the Shah's army was now distinctly heard, though not seen; the awful and mingled sounds of men in array against their fellow-creatures produced that uncertainty as to the results of the contest which called forth every energy. Zaul Khan and his son, Mustafa, and the other chiefs, were collected in a body, Zaul himself holding the match of his trusty piece of artillery, ready to discharge it at the most fitting opportunity. At length part of the advance was seen, and by degrees a denser mass, accompanied by the clang of arms, and the shouts of chieftains showed how powerful was the body of assailants. Judging by the conformation of the road they could not be far distant. The first streaks of morn began to illumine the East, and lightly gleamed over the body, bristling with spears and streaming penons.

At that moment Zaul stood forward, pointed the gun, and then invoking Allah and his prophet, with a steady hand and eye he advanced the match, and an explosion took place such as had not been heard in Asterabad by its oldest inhabitant. Its effects were instantaneous. Before the smoke had cleared away, the invading mass had almost entirely vanished, whilst the varied sounds which struck the ear might be assimilated to those which take place at the sinking of some great ship in the deep.

Shouts of alarm, cries of pain, lamentations, all were mixed up with the reverberating echoes of the explosion in the woods, and produced as great feelings of joy in Asterabad as they did of dismay in the royal army. At this moment Zohrab, mounted on his powerful steed, was seen in the greatest activity collecting a chosen body of horsemen around him, himself conspicuous in the crowd. Beaming with animation, he ordered the gates to be thrown open, and placing himself at their head, he darted off at full speed in pursuit of the retreating army. The vigour of their pursuit greatly increased the rapidity of the Shah's flight, and for a moment it was thought that the defeat was conclusive, and had emancipated Asterabad of its enemy; but those who judged thus, little knew the man they had to deal with. The Shah had not, 'tis true, anticipated such a reverse—but he was not unprepared, and not at all disheartened. Having retreated to a sufficient distance to rally his troops, he came to a halt, in order to devise some more effectual measure for a future attack. A few days passed over ere this army had recovered their defeat, whilst hope and confidence animated the city. However, a circumstance took place which soon altered the face of things.

It was in the dead of night, when the Shah, whose slumbers were usually disturbed, thought he heard men's voices close to his tent speaking in suppressed whispers. He immediately exclaimed, "Who is there! As you would live, speak!" A voice which he recognized to be the Vizir's, said, "As I am your sacrifice, it is your slave Hajji Ibrahim; let the Shah be tranquil, for his *takdeer* is at work in his service."

"What has happened?" said the Shah in a low voice, for he soon discovered how urgent secrecy was.

By the glimmering of a small lantern, whose dim flame scarcely threw light upon the objects around, appeared the Vizir, and with him a man dressed as a Mazanderan peasant, all torn and disfigured, indicating that he had forced his way through brake and bramble. His appearance bespoke the most abject of mortals, whilst in his features there was a smile of self-confidence, which said that he felt secure of meeting with a good reception.

"Who is this?" said the Shah, his gaunt figure rising

from under his Cashmere quilt, the dim light so indistinctly revealing the form of his figure, that he might, both in voice and aspect, have been taken for some corpse rising from the tomb.

"It is he of Shiraz," said the Vizir, "of whom your slave has already spoken. He brings us intelligence from the city, and offers to lead the Shah's troops to certain possession of it."

"How!" said the King, much delighted, whilst a flash of suspicion crossed his mind. "But is this a trick of that dog's son, Zaul, or are we to put trust in our good destiny?"

Upon this, Mirza Shireen Ali, for it was he, threw himself upon his knees before the king, and began to take a series of oaths, usual upon similar occasions, of his truth, his devotedness, and made liberal proffers of his head and life, in case he were found deceitful. "But," said he, "not a moment is to be lost. Order a strong detachment of your best troops to follow me, and I will lay down my life, if, ere to-morrow's dawn, they are not in full possession of the Resht gate of the city." He then stated how he had succeeded, through the co-operation of certain of the priesthood, to insure a strong party for the Shah within the city, and that at an appointed signal from without, the said gate would be opened, and a free entrance given to himself and followers.

Upon this the Shah immediately sent for his faithful Shir Khan, and confided to him the care of this expedition. In giving him his final orders, in a low tone of voice, he said, "I have one thing more to say; place that Shirazi with a burnt fether between two decided fellows, and give them orders to cut him down, should you perceive the least sign of treachery; and now Allah be with you!"

The time was calculated when this detachment ought to reach its destination, and it was determined that a renewed attack should be made on the Tehran gate, in order to create a diversion. Zaul and Zohrab, from excess of fatigue, had relaxed from their watchfulness, and, during the ensuing night, had retired to rest, fully convinced that, owing to the recent defeat, it would be impossible for the *Shah* to get his troops sufficiently into order to renew his

attack, at least for several days. They looked upon the Tehran gate so entirely as the point upon which the succeeding attacks would be directed, that although they had stationed a sufficient force at the other gates of the city, still they had not paid that attention to their security which they afterwards found they ought to have done.

The day had not yet dawned; stillness reigned throughout the city, and the slumbers of the commanders had not been yet disturbed, when one in the greatest haste was seen rushing towards the governor's head quarters, and pushing his way through every impediment, made his way good to where Zaul Khan was asleep. It was the old Osman, who has come to the reader's notice on several former occasions, and who now in the greatest fright awoke his chief with these words: "Oh, my Aga, my master, arise, arise! There is a movement at the Resht gate which your servant does not like. There are troops coming from without, and there has been a struggle within. In the name of Allah! come quickly." Zaul was instantly on the alert. Zohrab was there too. Both were immediately on their road to the prescribed spot, followed by as many men as they could collect on the urgency of the moment; but ere they had proceeded one hundred yards through the city, they were met by soldiers running away in dismay, who asserted that the gate had been treacherously opened, and that the enemy were entering in full force. At that moment a cry was heard from the sentinels on the towers of the Tehran gate, that the enemy was approaching, and soon after the report of the great gun was heard, a sound which spread terror and dismay through every breast. Zaul and his son were perplexed what course to pursue. In hasty consultation they agreed thus: "Be our rallying point the gate of the Ark or Citadel. "I," said Zaul, "will return to the Tehran Gate; you, Zohrab, try to resist the enemy, should they really have made their entrance good; but if you fail retreat into the Ark."

Zaul found that the officer on the Tehran gate having, in the greatest alarm, without skill or coolness, fired the gun, its contents had been thrown away, without producing the least effect, and consequently the enemy had advanced to the very brink of the ditch, had crossed it,

and were in the very act of battering down the gate. The brave chieftain at once found himself totally abandoned by his troops and officers, who by general consent were making the best of their way to the citadel. Thither the baffled Zaul also bent his way, despair in his breast, but resolute of purpose; and he had scarcely reached its entrance, ere he saw his son effecting a retreat before a mob of assailants, who appeared to have been joined by a great concourse of the townspeople. They met at the gate of their last strong hold, and their feelings in so doing were indeed of a nature which would have depressed bolder hearts than theirs.

"Zorab, my child! my friend!" said the broken man, as he dashed a tear from his eye, "thy father survives not this day."

"Oh, my father!" said the afflicted youth, "thy son will die with thee; but what becomes of my mother?"

"Go, Zohrab," said Zaul, with resolution in his accent, "go into the harem, prepare her for the worst, and take every precaution for securing her retreat through the wicket gate into the Turcoman country. Having done that return unto me. Thy father will never see his house more; he dies here."

"Perhaps we may still receive succour from without," said Zohrab doubtingly; the distant tribes of Turcomans are marching to our succour."

"Vain hope," said Zaul; "who will come to our help, when they know our castles are gone! No, Zohrab, we fight to-day, and to day only? But this I command you, as your father, and listen to his last words—Throw not your life away; be ye your mother's protector; live for her. Swear this upon this sword, and upon the holy Koran which binds my arm."

"I swear, if I live," said Zohrab, "never to abandon her; but I will never abandon thee, O my father!"

The struggle that took place between these two noble-hearted men was worthy of the finest age of heroism. Already had shouts from the multitude attested the entrance of the Shah's troops, and the first sounds of the enemy's attack upon the gate of the Ark were beginning to be heard, when Zohrab hastened to put his father's orders into effect, and to prepare his mother for the mis-

ries which were about to overwhelm them. He traversed the well-known courts of his father's palace with an aching heart, and as he met some of the old domestics on his way, it almost burst with anguish at the fate which was awaiting them. He entered the harem with a look which was indeed portentous of the ill-fated message he was about to communicate. The horrid and tumultuous sounds which struck their ears, had warned its inmates that all was not right, and the moment they saw Zohrab their fears increased to a certainty. Without waiting for explanations, they raised loud cries and lamentations, whilst Zohrab's mother, rushing into his arms, read in his woe-stricken countenance all he would disclose.

"Where is your father?" said she; "my son, tell me. Am I a widow? Oh, Zohrab, tell me, tell me!"

"Heaven forbid, my mother!" said he, "he lives and is well; but our affairs have taken an unfortunate turn. Treachery has opened our gates to the enemy, and the Shah is at hand. You must be gone. You must away to the Turcomans, so says my father. Make instant preparations."

"How Zohrab, and without him? Never, never! We live or we die together."

"He will defend us to the last," said Zohrab, "and when all hope is gone, then we will make good our retreat through the secret gate. Delay not—make every preparation—take as little as you can with you, and be ready for flight at a moment's notice."

To this the sapient matron consented; but when her wishes were made known to the women slaves, and to Mariam, the distress that ensued was beyond her power of control. So fearful was Zohrab of being softened by them, that leaving the harem in haste, he rushed back to his father, who by this time had ascended the summit of one of the towers which flanked the gate of the Ark, and accompanied by his most devoted followers, was taking a survey of the heart-rending scene before him, and contemplating, with a steady and determined mind, the fate that he saw would inevitably be his. The *maidan* or square was now entirely occupied by the king's troops under the command of Shir Khan; and although they had not lost time in making a demonstration to force the

gates of the citadel, still it was evident they were only waiting the arrival of the Shah in person, before they put the finishing hand to their conquest. Already, however, the work of pillage and devastation had begun; every where, the unresisting inhabitants were flying from before the furious soldiery, and cries of distress and misery were heard issuing from every quarter. Soon after a rush of brilliantly equipped cavaliers, the Gholambai Shah, or royal body guard, so renowned in Persian courts, announced the speedy arrival of the Shah, and he was seen slowly proceeding through the avenues of the city, with cautious and suspicious eye looking right and left, like the tiger surrounded by objects of prey, but uncertain upon which to make his first spring. A small tent had been hastily pitched for him, and carpets spread, and there he alighted midst the shouts of sycophants and the greetings of servile mollahs. The anxious crowd opened in a half circle before him, his officers of state stood around, and, like the suspended exhibitions on a theatre, it appeared as if the actors were only waiting his commands to begin again. At length, Shir Khan was seen dismounting from his horse to make his obeisance to the monarch, and pointing towards the gate of the Ark, was evidently asking the king's permission to commence the attack.

All this was passing under the immediate eye of Zaul, and every moment he was more convinced that Astera-bad was lost to him and his family forever, and that further resistance would be as useless as unavailing. But still he was resolved to sell his life as dearly as possible. "My son," said Zaul, as he turned to Zohrab, "let me embrace thee once more—for this is our last meeting.—Do not let thy father's corpse fall into the hands of his enemy—protect thy mother; and after the great Allah and his holy prophet—honour thyself."

Zohrab heard these words with the tenderness and devotion of a son, and with the dignity of a man and a hero. "We are in God's hand," he said, "to whatever he ordains, let us bend our heads in submission." Upon this they mutually drew their swords; and repeating the *bismillah*, with the fervour and determination of martyrs, they gave each other a long and lingering embrace.

CHAPTER XV.

—— “Then on my bending back
The welcome load of my dear father take.”

DRYDEN'S VIRGIL.

AFTER the defeat of the royal army at the attack of the Tehran gate, the Shah had solemnly sworn on the Koran and by his own head, that he would deliver up the city for three successive days to the pillage of his troops ; and that he would not be satisfied unless at the end of that time twenty mauns of human eyes were placed before him. Humanity shudders at this recital, but true it is that in Persia, now as in ancient times, the extraction of eyes was always a punishment resorted to when death was not inflicted. Noses and ears were also frequently commanded to be brought before the conqueror, upon sacking a city ; eyes almost always. When he entered the city, this terrible mandate was spread abroad, and it may be imagined that those who had been instrumental in opening the gate to his troops, now, but too late, perceived their mistake, and recollected with anguish the prophetic words of their magnanimous governor. The Shah's hatred of Zaul and his family had risen in proportion to the resistance which he had encountered. His haughty spirit could not look back upon what he had suffered—his mortification at Tehran, the loss of his guns, and more than all, the overthrow which he had so recently received—without feeling a thirst for vengeance, which nothing but their blood could assuage, and he determined never to sheathe his sword until dead or alive he had both father and son in his possession.

Plunder had commenced ere the Shah entered the city, but he did not give his final sanction to the ensuing violence until, as we have already related, he dismounted from his horse and seated himself in his tent. There, surrounded by his principal officers, by the traitor Mirza Shireen Ali, and the mollahs of the city, his face beaming with ferocious malignity, he pronounced the awful sentence of the *katl-i-aum*, or general massacre, and to

give it an appearance of lawful and religious severity, he caused a firman for that purpose to be issued, sanctioned by a *fatvah* of the *Mushtehed* of Persia. Moreover, by way of giving greater weight to his commands, or of more completely reviling his fallen foe, he commanded the *Asterabad Ullemah*, or priesthood, also to apply their seals of approbation to this document of mockery.

Then might be heard the uplifted voices of a whole city in malediction of the tyrant. The sounds of forcible entrance into houses, the cries of their inhabitants, the mother bereft of her children, children of their parents; all the accumulated horrors of a licentious soldiery, not only uncontrolled but ordained, were let loose upon the unoffending people, and scenes so horrible took place, that we willingly draw a veil over them, lest the feelings, as well as the incredulity of our readers should be excited.*

It was more immediately upon those who had taken refuge in the citadel, where the very essence of his enemies would be, that the Shah was burning to let loose the myrimidons of his revenge. The advance of Shir Khan, at the head of his detachment, after he had entered the Resht gate, had been so rapid, that Zaul and Zohrab had found it impossible to break down the bridge which led into the Ark, and thus the ditch round the fort became useless as a defence. They had in vain attempted to dislodge those of their opponents, who had taken possession of both bridge and ditch, and it was evident that as soon as a decided and general attack could be made upon the gates, they must fall. The efforts which they made, by showering down missiles, in order to clear the bridge preparatory to a sally, were remarked by the Shah, and he saw that no decided step could be taken to destroy the gate, until the towers and parapets above were cleared; accordingly, he ordered a detachment of his best Khorassan marksmen to ascend the roof of a mosque which commanded the tower, and thence to fire unceasingly upon those who occupied them.

Zaul's quick eye soon saw this movement, and he also

* See the History of the Siege of Kerman, in Malcolm's *History of Persia*, 8vo. vol. ii. p. 124.

posted some men to meet the Tuffenkchis by corresponding volleys, as soon as they should appear at their prescribed post. Standing near his son, they were conspicuous figures both from below and from the mosque. Although he was evidently acting under an impression of his approaching fate, his coolness and presence of mind never forsook him. With hand extended, he was on the point of ordering a discharge of musketry, when a ball, a ball as if impelled by destiny, struck him so palpably in the heart, that he fell into the arms of his son, closed his eyes from that moment, and never spake more. At this sight a sound of savage exultation was heard from the assembled assailants. The Shah himself saw it, and straightway calling for his horse mounted, and riding forward he roared out, "Now to the gates—down with them. A hundred tomauns for the head of Zaul, and five hundred for Zohrab alive." The effect was instantaneous. Every one rushed to the spot; the battery of the gates was renewed, and very soon after their downfall was heard with an awful crash.

Zohrab had been abandoned by all, save his faithful Ali, for no sooner had those in the Ark remarked how nigh was their destruction at hand, than all sought safety in flight, some in one direction and some in another. He seemed now to have acquired a supernatural vigour and strength. Shot fell thick around him; he heeded them not. He bent over the body of his father with reverential awe. He endeavoured at first to staunch the blood which fell from the wound, but when he saw how hopeless any attempt to restore life would be, he only thought upon his father's last injunctions not to let his body fall a prey to the enemy; and when the crash of the falling gates struck his ears, aided and followed by Ali, he caught his lifeless parent in his arms, and passing the body over his left shoulder, leaving his right hand free to wield his sword, he descended the turret stairs, and entered upon the court leading to the gates of the harem.

He had scarcely reached the end of the first court, when he heard a body of the assailants behind him. The headmost of the throng having caught sight of him tottering under his burthen, immediately a chase of

life and death took place in pursuit of him. New life impelled the hard-pressed youth, the spirit of his slaughtered father seemed to infuse itself within him, he ran with a swiftness more than human. Ali had preceded him to secure the opening of the harem gates. One among the assailants, more active than the rest, most excited by the hopes of securing the prescribed prize, was close upon him—a race, such as had never been seen between men, was running—cupidity on one side, filial love on the other; the audacious soldier was about seizing upon the almost exhausted Zohrab, when our hero suddenly stopped, turned, and ere his pursuer could recover himself, uplifted his unerring scimitar, he dealt him such a blow, that it cleft him in twain, and by this act materially stopped the progress of others, who were following upon the same track. Zohrab then succeeded in entering, and immediately closed the gates of his present security upon the tide of rushing and ruthless foes.

Panting and faint from exhaustion, he carefully laid down his precious burthen—but what pen can describe the scene which followed. There was the body of the slain father extended on the ground, whilst the son pale with fatigue, covered with the blood of his parent, looked like another corpse—then came the distracted widow—the half-crazed mother, followed by the other women, who, upon seeing the body of their beloved master, uttered such screams, such heart-rending cries, that the assailants without suspended their violence, and respected the bitterness of the woe which struck their ears from within.

However, much time was not given to the woe-stricken family for the indulgence of their grief. The sounds of forcible entrance soon made themselves manifest, and roused Zohrab into action. At once regaining possession of his presence of mind, he hushed every cry by his commanding tone and manner. Tenderly embracing his mother, he urged her immediate departure by the secret gate, which leading at once into the jungle, she would there meet with an escort of Turcoman horse who would convey her and suite without delay to a place of safety. *He confided her to the protection of Ali.* Having care-

fully wrapt his father's body in a sheet, it was first conveyed down the stair-case, leading through a small turret, to the postern, and then, having insisted upon the unhesitating departure of every one, he promised his mother that he would only stay long enough to defend the harem, until she was too distant for pursuit, and then would not fail to join her in person.

Mirza Shireen Ali, the traitor, who well knew the avenues of the citadel as those of the harem, had been amongst the foremost to enter therein, hoping that by seizing Zohrab, he might secure the price which the Shah had set upon his person; accordingly when he had seen him chased within the gates of the harem, he ascended the walls by a certain ruined inlet, whence he could observe the secret gate, from which he was sure Zaul's family, conducted by Zohrab, would endeavour to escape. He reached that point just as the disconsolate widow, conducting her husband's corpse, had succeeded in gaining the opposite side of the city ditch—but he saw not Zohrab; his exultation was great when he found that the prize might still be his, for evidently he was yet within the harem, and he immediately decided that if he could but close the postern, that object would be secured. He pointed out that circumstance to one of the townspeople, who had followed him in the hope also of securing the prize. By a steep and crooked path they descended, and heaping up stones effectually closed the gate. This was no sooner done, than Mirza Shireen returned to the attack carrying on the gates of the harem, raising the hopes of the assailants by assuring them that their prey was still within, for that he had ascertained his family alone had left it.

By this time the Shah in person had arrived, when a renewed attack began, and with so much vigour, that the gates began to give way. Zohrab now thought it right to secure his escape. Sole tenant of a dwelling in which he had first drawn breath, he looked around him for the last time with feelings of gloom, whilst enemies were beating at the gate seeking his blood; and unwilling to quit a spot so dear to him, he lingered and looked, and looked again, when at length the falling gates told him it was time to retreat. Confident that none but himself

was acquainted with the avenues leading to the postern, he leisurely took his way thither, whilst he heard the enemy in full possession of his paternal mansion.

But to his surprise he heard a rush of footsteps exactly in the direction in which he was himself proceeding:—he hastened onward—still he was followed. Every intricacy seemed to be as well known to his followers as to himself, and when he had reached the entrance of the small turret he turned about, and to his surprise he saw Mirza Shireen followed by a large body of soldiery. At once he determined to sell his life as dearly as possible, but still retreated down the stairs, narrow and confined as they were, in the hope that having once gained the door, by his superior activity he might easily escape from his pursuers. He perceived the head of the column of his pursuers at the top just as he had reached the bottom. To his surprise the gate, which but so short a time since had been left open by his mother was closed; he rushed on to open it, and to his still greater surprise he found it strongly fastened. Then indeed despair seized him, and he felt that he had but a short time to live. Again and again he lent his whole strength to the gate, but it was not in the power of man to stir it. He looked up, and saw that his antagonists still lingered at the top of the stairs, evidently afraid to approach him. One was urging on the other. The lion was at bay, and not a dog had the courage to face him. At length the voice of the sycophant and traitor Mirza Shireen was heard saying—"Zohrab Khan, as you love life—as you would not die—hear the words of a friend. *Wallah billah*, I say true! Lay down your sword, and receive the Shah's pardon—I am your surety."

"Dog and traitor," exclaimed Zohrab, "hold thy treacherous tongue. Open a path for me, or by the word of a desperate man I will cleave thy soul in twain." Then making one more desperate effort to see whether he could not force the door, and finding it in vain, he fiercely grasped his sword afresh, and showed symptoms of making an attack upon the cowards above. He was about making good his threat, when a voice which once heard never could be mistaken—the voice of the Shah himself *was distinguished* above the rest, urging the lingering

soldiers to the attack of the solitary Zohrab. There was now a compact crowd on the head of the stairs, still with Mirza Shireen and his hypocrite face in front. "Sons of burnt fathers," roared the Shah, "are ye afraid of one man? Seize, but do not kill him!" A movement of attack was manifest, still no one would venture to be the first. At length Zohrab, with despair in his heart and resolution in his countenance, rushed blindly upward, sword in hand, and fearlessly attacked the whole collected mob. The first who fell a sacrifice to his fury was the traitor, who at one blow paid the forfeit of his wickedness. Upon this the crowd retreated. The Shah's voice was again heard. At length his assailants, finding it impossible to seize him alive, devised the effectual mode of overwhelming him with large masses of masonry. Heavy blocks were impelled down the stairs, until at length a ponderous stone coming in contact with his temple, he fell stunned, and immediately the dastardly crew fastened upon his every limb; and thus entirely overpowered, he hopelessly became their prisoner.

He was dragged with exulting shouts through the passages leading to the narrow staircase, advantage having been taken of his state of insensibility to tie his arms and hands strongly behind his back. Despoiled of his sword, and reeling onward, partly from faintness and from intensity of pain, he was thus dragged before the king. The aspects which these two individuals presented were indeed as different as they could be. The one surrounded by power, flushed with conquest, thirsting for revenge; the other, alone and helpless, and though pale and disfigured by the contest which he had sustained, covered with blood and mutilated by wounds, still bore a dignified and undaunted presence, and though a vile and ignominious death was impending, still neither by word or look did he betray the smallest submission to the tyrant.

The Shah returned to his pavillion in the maidan until the palace in the Ark should be in readiness for his reception, and there, surrounded by his principal officers, he received his fallen prisoner.

"You are again in our power," said the Shah; "but no longer a hostage;—by the blessing of the prophet that day has gone by! Look upon that sun which now shineth, and well—for 'tis thy last."

"Kill me now," said Zohrab; "then I shall die without being grateful to thee for any thing."

"Strike the wretch on the mouth, should he speak again," said the Shah, his wrath rising at the sight of the independent bearing of his prisoner.

"I have but one word more to say," said Zohrab, "before, *inshallah*, I leave this life: stop the blood which is now spilling;—order thy ruthless soldiers to sheath their swords, and spare the people who are innocent;—let Zohrab be their atoning sacrifice. If they have erred 'tis by our example; if they have resisted thee, 'tis by our ordinance. If thou hast a heart, let my words reach it; and if thou hast a soul, let the fear of a future life and future retribution overtake it."

"Dog," said the Shah, "wilt thou preach to me? Can the cur approach the lion otherwise than by licking his feet."

"Dog, sayest thou?" retorted Zohrab; "dog, and father of dogs art thou thyself, tyrant and murderer! Do thy worst upon me—I revile thee."

The vivid paleness of rage became sensibly visible in the countenance of the Shah, as the words of the prisoner struck his ear. He would instantly have given way to his wrath, and ordered immediate execution, but he saw through Zohrab's real wish of instant death, and would not indulge him. He ordered him away from his presence, saying—"Thy moment is not yet come—our revenge is not yet complete—thy end shall be as public and as ignominious as thy life has been rebellious. Bear him off, and hear:—let his confinement be so strict, that the Shah will be jealous if even a ray of light visit him."

Upon this order, the executioner's gang seized upon their victim, and in the face of the wonderstruck crowd, who bowed their heads in submission to the Shah's power in proportion to the fallen state in which they saw his enemy, they dragged him off with every species of contumely towards that mansion, of which, but the day before, he had been the lord and master. They then lodged him in certain under ground chambers, originally intended for prisoners, but which during the mild rule of Zaul Khan, had seldom known the presence of a prisoner. *There they left him, condemned to the fate of a common*

malefactor, giving him the bare ground for a bed, with the mere sustenance of bread and water, whilst heavy chains encumbered his body.

In the meanwhile the work of devastation was proceeding with unabated fury throughout the city. Frequently would those who surrounded the Shah, watch the expression of his face, hoping it would exhibit some symptoms of remorse, in order that they might throw in a word of intercession, but hitherto in vain. Once Sedek ventured to say, as increasing supplies of eyes were brought in by the executioners, "As I am your sacrifice, your slave has made the calculation, and the number is complete. God grant it may be so!"

"Ill born that you are!" said the unfeeling tyrant, "if it be not complete, thy eyes shall add to the number. Why wilt thou stay the hand of justice?"

After this no one dared open their lips; but with despair in their hearts, they stood in silence before him, whilst ever and anon, as some sounds of lamentation more than usually doleful and clamorous struck his ear, they imagined that in a more thoughtful mood he began to feel the workings of humanity in his breast. A wretch of an executioner, a savage of most ferocious aspect, his arms bared to the shoulders, his hands crimson with blood, and his beard clotted with foam, had just brought in a tray covered with eyes, and placed them before the Shah. There he stood in an attitude of exultation, expecting the usual donation. The Shah, contemplating the horrid objects for some time, at length drew his small riding whip from his girdle, and with the handle thereof began to count them, telling them off by pairs, and in doing this, he broke out into the following soliloquy. "O Allah! is it in truth right and just to continue thus to send thy wrath upon an offending and rebellious people!" Upon this the Grand Vizir, whose heart could no longer withstand its impulse for intercession, stepped forward, fell upon his knees, and touching his forehead to the ground, exclaimed, "*Ahi*, my king and master, God loves compassion. Blessed are they, sayeth our holy Koran, who love mercy and enforce it; let thy slave intercede for the poor wretches, who have no other fault than being inhabitants of this city."

The perverseness of the Shah's mind, acting upon his hot and ardent nature, was like a parasitical plant, which is seen to entwine itself, cover over, and take possession of a large tree in the forests of tropical climates; for upon hearing the words of the Vizir, the savage monarch turned up his blood-seeking eyes, and instead of being moved by the humility of his minister, exclaimed sarcastically, "Art thou too throwing words in the air? Begone, look after thy mirzas and scribes, and leave the sword where it ought to be." Upon which Hajji Ibrahim with dignity made his lowest obeisance, and left the presence a much less zealous and devoted servant than before he received this rebuke.

Among the great congregation of people who had surrounded the Shah's tent during the scene of Zohrab's condemnation, a woman closely veiled had been remarked, almost the only one who had ventured into a crowd at once so lawless and so submissive. This was Zulma; although her views had been so much raised by the position in which she had been placed by the Shah, that the tender feelings of love had almost been obliterated by those of ambition, yet when she again saw Zohrab, so great in his fall, so fitted to interest a woman's affection, and particularly such a creature of impulse as Zulma all her former love for him returned, and her only wish now, was to free him from his bonds, and to fly with him to any spot, however remote, where she might enjoy his gratitude, and secure a return of her passion. She retreated to the dwelling which had been assigned her pensive and impatient. She determined first to try how far she might persuade the Shah to save his life, and then, if she did not succeed, to devise other schemes for his release. Accordingly, at night, when after the fatigues and anxieties of the day, the king called her before him to solace himself by her conversation, she began by degrees to try her ground ere she ventured to make her request.

"The *takdeer* of the king of kings, after all," said she, "is something unheard of in the annals of our country. For who in truth was equal to Zohrab in heroism? still here he is kissing the feet of the Shah.

"You say true," said the Shah, who was never better

pleased than when he was called a favourite of fortune. "Wisdom is something ! but good luck is all in all !"

"And by the blessing of Allah !" said the designing maiden, "all anxiety for Asterabad and its rebellious subjects is now over. The Shah has only the one thought now of reaping the best fruits of his victory !"

"Yes !" said the king, "let them behave well in future, and he will raise their heads to the skies !"

"They will ever provide a fine race of warriors to the Shah, at least," said Zulma ; "as for instance—if that ill-fated Zohrab had not been such a rebel and so *wajeb el catl*, so necessary to slay, what a leader of the king's troops would he not make ?"

"In truth, yes," said the King, half angry at having thus been drawn into such a confession. "He would be a fine soldier any where, but he dreams of any thing but submission—he looks for dominion—such a thing must not live."

"His whole existence is now changed," said Zulma ; "the air has escaped from his brain ; without that unsainted father of his, who in truth was a misfortune, he will in future take to quiet as his last resource."

"The time has gone by," said the king, suspicious of his companion's views. "Had he done this whilst he was a hostage, well—but now, men will laugh if the Shah spares him. He dies—be it now, or be it in a short time hence—the thread of his destiny is spun out, and Irân will no longer possess her Zohrab."

Catching at this delay, which she had not even anticipated, Zulma said every thing she could to promote it, hoping that some occurrence might, in the meanwhile, take place to save his life, and with that hope she retired for the night. During the short time she had enjoyed the king's countenance, she had succeeded in acquiring great influence over him. Whether that tincture of energy and violence, which was mixed with all her thoughts and actions, was pleasing to him, set off, as it was, by great beauty, and directed frequently by much adroitness ; or whether it is the nature of man, even the most wayward and the most self-willed, to cede to a counter-violence, proceeding, as it did in this instance, from an inferior and a dependent ; true it is, that he permitted her

to speak more openly to him than any other person, and reposing upon the obligations which were heaped upon herself and family, he ventured to refresh his mind by expressions of confidence, which manifested the trust he reposed in her fidelity.

He had long been expecting the arrival of his nephew and successor. He felt that their meeting would be one of much difficulty; for how could he talk to him with proper temper upon the loss of his sister! He longed that Fattah Ali might reach him at the present moment, when his feelings were awakened to their utmost pitch of excitement, for then he knew he could extricate himself by words of violence, and by commands which would impose silence even upon the most refractory. He knew the effect which a victorious king produced upon the minds of the Persian people, and foresaw that it would now be reflected back upon the mind of his young relative, whatever might be the frame of mind in which he would arrive. Besides, had he not the very man in his custody, on whose account his sister had met with her fate, and he felt upon that ground alone he would be able successfully to meet his nephew.

Upon this subject he had explained his mind to Zulma, and it had been the means of opening another source of ambition to her. She had frequently heard of the excellencies of the youthful Prince—of the beauty of his person, of the intelligence of his mind, of his dexterity at all manly exercises; and when she gave full scope to her imagination, she could dream of the possibility of becoming the banou of his harem, and of swaying the counsels of a king of Persia, as she had formerly taken the lead in the chief executioner's household. Thus was her wayward and unsettled mind tossed between three ideas:—the first, that of becoming the actual arbitress of the fate of Persia, by her influence and control over its present sovereign; the second, of being united to the heir apparent of the throne, and thus becoming the wife of the most attractive of men—the most envied of women; and thirdly, taking advantage of her present situation, to save and secure the affections of him who alone really filled her thoughts, and who was in fact the one object of her adoration.

CHAPTER XVI.

Ev'n he, this youth—though dimm'd and gone
 Each star of hope that cheer'd him on—
 His glories lost—his cause betray'd—
 Irân, his dear-loved country, made
 A land of carcases and slaves.

LALLA ROOKH.

As soon as the horrors of the *katl-i aum* had subsided, the Shah left his tents and took possession of Zaul's palace. Although there is much prejudice among Persians against inhabiting the home of one who has met the death which Zaul had encountered, (for even a son objects living in the same house in which his father died); yet in this instance, for certain political reasons, the Shah thought it right to overlook all difficulties. He wished to exhibit himself to the Asterabadis as their sovereign, and to sit in the place which they had been accustomed to revere as the seat of their governor. He knew the effect which such an act would produce upon the minds of a people who bend the head to outward signs of power, and he was moreover anxious to let it be known among the Turcomans how totally the rule of their late ally had been supplanted, and that it was to himself for the future they must look for protection.

The whole building had been completely cleansed—the fountains were made to play—the royal carpets were spread, and at an hour authorized by the astrologers the Shah took his seat in the *dewan khaneh* of the palace, which had held within its walls the great Shah Abbas, its original founder, and many of the succeeding princes of that line. Here he received the congratulations of his courtiers and warriors upon the occasion of his conquest, to which, real or commanded, were added those of the priesthood of Asterabad, who put up prayers for his prosperity.

Zulma, at the same time, was installed in the women's apartments of the palace. Had her ambition been less,

her feelings might have been greatly excited by the reflection that she now occupied the birth place of the man she so ardently admired—that here under the eyes of his parents, he had risen into manhood, and that his home, so dear to him, at a blow had been driven to the four winds of heaven. Her feelings, however, were intensely roused, when she was told that in certain *zeer-zemeens*, underground cells, contiguous to her dwelling, the object of her love and solicitude himself was now in confinement. This intelligence induced a restlessness and a desire to see him, which no reasoning could conquer. In vain she apprehended the risks she might run of the Shah's displeasure in case she were discovered; nothing could stop her determination, and happen what might she resolved to visit him. It is true that she possessed ~~no~~ facility for so doing, and there was no likelihood that the step she was about to take would be known; for the prisoner had been given into the custody of her father; and every one of his servants, his deputy and all, were her devoted slaves, and indeed now doubly so, since she occupied her present eminent situation.

The females which composed her household were few, for she had neither had time nor opportunity to surround herself by those numerous officers usual to persons in her situation, therefore she feared no detection from their scrutiny. She managed so well that the man on guard over the prisoner should be peculiarly devoted to her will, who would give her an immediate entrance to his cell; she determined that very night, after her usual audience with the king, to seek the unfortunate Zohrab in his confinement.

It was past midnight, the whole city at rest, and not a sound heard, when covering herself closely with her veil, Zulma, at the small gate of the harem, waited for her conductor. He came at the prescribed time, and taking his way through a long avenue, which led into a court once occupied by the slaves of Zaul Khan's establishment, he descended into a low and vaulted chamber, which formed a sort of ante-room to the prison in which Zohrab was confined. Its walls were of great thickness, and there was a chill of damp and mould about them, which gave the approach to the prison an

air of utter wretchedness. She took the small lantern which her guide held in his hand, into her own, and as he unbarred the heavy door of the prison, she bade him remain without until her business with the prisoner should be at an end.

The greatest misery which Zohrab had experienced since he had been placed in confinement, was the delay allowed to take place ere he was deprived of life. When his thoughts turned upon himself, and he retraced in his mind the different paths through which his short life had travelled, his recollections presented nothing that could wound his spirit; but when he turned his recollections to the miseries that had overwhelmed his family, the recent and awful death of his father, and the exiled and destitute state of his mother, to which was added the bitter retrospect of his Amima's death, his heart gave way to the deepest anguish, and the vaulted roof of his prison rang with the occasional bursts of his grief.

It was one of these bursts that caught the ear of Zulma as she was about entering the prison. She paused in an attitude of attention ere she ventured to proceed. At length, holding the lamp over her eyes, in order to discover in the darkness where the wretched youth lay, she slowly opened the door and entered. Zohrab, who thought that his hour was come, soon turned his grief into joy as he caught the first glimpse of the light; but when he perceived a woman's form approaching, he began to think that it might be a vision of his brain, and starting from his stony bed with a wild and astonished air, his bright eyes looking through a countenance disfigured by neglect and worn by fatigue, he said in a tone of great seriousness—"In the name of Allah, who are you?—what seek you?,"

"Zohrab," said Zulma, struck with awe at the solemnity of the scene, "am I unknown to you? Is Zulma nothing in your eyes?"

"*Ahi*," said Zohrab, immediately regaining his self-possession; what interest can one so prosperous find in one so wretched? Is the Lady Zulma come to mock the misery of a fallen man?"

"*Astafarallah*," said Zulma, highly touched at seeing

the miserable state of the once powerful Zohrab. "I am come," said she, "to offer you consolation. I am your friend;—there is much to hope if Zohrab will bow the heart of pride before the hand of power. Zulma can do much."

"Life is of too little value, lady, to one so wretched, that I should now give it up to slavery and ignominy. I have but one object left to desire, and that is the welfare of my mother. If you can help me to secure that, you will have the satisfaction of receiving the thanks and the gratitude of a dying man."

"Is there none else in the world," said Zulma, mortified at what she looked upon as a poor compliment to herself, "for whom you wish to live. Has the devotion of one who places herself at your feet no attractions for you—?"

"What words are these?" said Zohrab; roused by recollections of what it had been the study of his life to suppress. All secrets, are vain now—death will soon wipe away from the mind of man the recollection of either the murdered Amima, or the to-be-murdered Zohrab. Had she been alive, then indeed would the wretch before you have kissed the dust of your feet to save him;—but she is gone. What joys can life promise him without her—no, lady, no,—leave me to die."

Zulma, stung to the quick by these words, would indeed have left him; and although she saw that it would be impossible to inspire him with love for her, yet there was that irresistible attraction in his person, heightened as it was by the magnanimity of his resignation under misfortune, that she could not resist lingering on in the hope of seeing him relent, and accept of the promise of life which she held out to him.

"Think no more of Amima," said she: "whatever has been, so let it be; the destinies of individuals are in the hands of God; but has not Zohrab a heart for two Amimas? When one day has shut in, and is covered by the shades of night, does not the sun shine on a second?"

"Lady," said Zohrab, "you are talking to one who has already fixed his thoughts upon an hereafter, and

who would rather seek it and its uncertainties, than all the deceitful pleasures of this world."

Zulma looked at him with astonishment. Her mind could never conceive that such heroism and disregard of the world could exist in any breast; and when she saw this man, in the prime of life, clinging to the hope of death as the one object of his wishes, she could only suppose that his mind had been struck by some talismanic charm, and that imbecility had taken the place of his once vigorous intellect.

She was about taking her departure, when Zohrab raised himself in his chains, and bending himself forward, said, "As you love Allah!—if you be a true believer and a woman!—let the entreaties of one who will shortly be no more, be heard in favour of his wretched, destitute mother!"

The imploring attitude in which he stood—the feeling tone of his entreaty, restored all the tenderness of her feeling. She turned towards him with a rapture which lightened up her features into hope and extacy, and she would have shown him to what a degree she loved, when she was met by a coldness that at once told her how vain were her hopes, and that the man before whom she stood could not feign a sentiment which he did not feel. She therefore retreated in confusion; her wrath rising in proportion to the greatness of her disappointment, and leaving the wretched Zohrab to his pride and his solitude, she returned whence she came.

Still upon reflection she hoped that, left to himself, his resolution might alter, and that he might think better of the advantages which she had held out to him. Therefore, she determined to continue her good offices in his favour with the Shah, and, at all events, to stop any pursuit of his mother that might have been ordered, hoping by such an act to secure at least an avenue to his gratitude. She arose the next morning full of these schemes, when she was informed that the Prince Fattah Ali had just arrived, and her informant added, that to this moment he was totally ignorant of the death of his sister. This greatly turned the current of her thoughts, and she was not wrong in her conclusion that this circumstance must create some extraordinary sensation at court.

In fact, the youth, who, my readers may recollect, was introduced to their notice at the beginning of this our narrative, thoughtless, ardent, and amiable, is now to be brought before them as a formed man. His person, which before was slim and unformed, had acquired strength and squareness. His beard had gained sufficient consistency to become an ornament; and throughout his whole appearance there was a manliness of manner and speech, which spoke at once in his favour. The effect, which he produced by his presence at the Shah's court, acted like magic, or like the genial warmth of the sun vivifying a drooping vegetation, which had long languished under the effects of blight. Every one who looked upon him, felt their hearts expand at the idea, that he was destined to be their future ruler, and suppressing the sigh which the horror of their present miseries prompted, could smile with inward hope that the day was not far distant when that iron hand of despotism which now weighed so hard upon them, might be replaced by the softer touch of the mild prince they now beheld. The sort of tacit adulation which was paid him, was a test of the pleasure which his presence afforded; for it was involuntary and sincere. From the Vizir to the meanest camp-follower, he met with nothing but looks and expressions of welcome; and although they were to him the most flattering testimonies of public approbation which he could receive, yet he was aware how prudent it would be in him rather to avoid than seek them, knowing the jealous and suspicious temper of his uncle.

The Grand Vizir, the venerable Hajji Ibrahim Khan, looked upon him as his own son. He had acted so entirely as he had wished in the government of the province of Fars, which by wisdom and moderation he had elevated from a state of ruin to one of riches and prosperity, that he cherished him not only as his disciple in the science of the government, but also as the promoter of the future glory and happiness of the kingdom at large. He received him with every mark of respect as his future sovereign, and with every testimony of affection as his obedient pupil. But, in so doing, he shuddered at the reflection how cruelly—how bitterly the finer feelings of *this noble youth* were about to be tortured, by the melan-

choly intelligence which sooner or later must be disclosed to him. He loved his sister Amima with the fondest love—a sentiment which orphans in their situation could only feel. He had left his government with regret, but that was counterbalanced by the joyful expectation of holding communication with his beloved sister. It is a custom in Persia, to withhold the news of death from the person most concerned (so much so as to become a business of life and death when it concerns princes and governors) as long as it is possible. Consequently, although the melancholy supposed death of the Shah's niece and banou was pretty generally known, particularly among men in office, still no one ever ventured to hint it to her brother, and all through his journey, to the very moment of its being disclosed to him at Asterabad, he had actually lived in the hope of meeting her at Tehran.

Sadek was another of those who testified the greatest pleasure at seeing the prince; for however anxious he might feel at the result of the disclosure which would be made to him, still he was so greatly attached to his person, having been from his earliest infancy accessary in bringing him up, that he could not repress his satisfaction at seeing him again. This, however, was greatly mitigated by his fear of the Shah; for, during his long servitude, he had been so constantly obliged to educate the very looks and fashion of his face to the temper and whim of the monarch, that a smile on Sadek's face was as rare an occurrence as a sight of the sun in a northern winter, and demonstrations of either pleasure or pain were as little seen upon it, as wind blowing on the surface of a mirror.

The first desire of the prince, was to be admitted into the presence of his uncle. To the tyrant, the news of his arrival gave no pleasure; on the contrary, it excited his ill-humour. He had a sort of intuitive feeling how much he would lose in the comparison which would not fail being made between the king that was, and the king that was to be. Whenever his nephew's name was mentioned, it was accompanied by either actual expressions of approbation, or by such looks of good-will, that the Shah felt that a tacit comparison in the mind of the speaker was then making to his prejudice. The very

beauty of his nephew's person and suavity of his manners were odious to the uncle, and it was esteemed the worst road to his good-will either to laud or to uphold him in any manner.

Upon his rising on that day, Sadek was the appointed person to apprise the Shah of the arrival of the prince; and fully aware how delicate was the task, considering in how ferocious a mood his mind would be, he took care to be cautious, and not to let the sunshine which beamed in his breast break out upon his face, but to compose his features into a cast so wooden and unconcerned, that the Shah could not discover what was working within.

With that quickness of perception which was peculiar to him, the Shah having remarked that something had occurred, said to Sadek: "What news is there?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said his servant, "nothing. The Prince Fattch Ali requests to kiss your feet."

To this the Shah answered not a word, but continued the operations of the toilet apparently unconcerned. When he was dressed Sadek expected the order to admit the prince immediately into the presence; but he was surprised to hear the king say that he would receive him at the usual public selam at noon, a mark of such total unconcern, that Sadek supposed the king intended thereby to mark his displeasure at his tardy arrival. But the truth was, that however unconcerned the tyrant might wish to appear, yet in fact a very different feeling actuated him. He dreaded to see his nephew,—he dreaded the explanations which he must make touching his sister's death, and he wished to see him first as an attendant at the public audience, rather than *tête-a-tête*, where the first inquiries which Fattch Ali would make, would be concerning his sister. And on seeing him there he determined to do what Sadek had suspected, namely, to put a slight upon him.

At the usual hour, when all the courtiers, officers of state, warriors, and men of the law, each at their respective posts, were ready in attendance in the great court yard of the *dewan khaneh*, they perceived the Prince Fattch Ali make his appearance, almost at the very moment that his uncle was taking his place upon the musnud. *He stood respectfully without, and made his obeisance*

with the rest of those present. The Shah took no more notice of him than he did of any one else; but he could not but be struck at the unequivocal marks of satisfaction which appeared in the faces and manner of all present, at seeing their future sovereign among them. The prince's own demeanour was in every way marked by good sense. He did not manifest any mortification at the mode of his reception, but took his station where he knew from his rank he was entitled to stand. At length, after the Shah had spoken the usual words of little import to the grand vizir, and had given certain directions concerning the police and administration of the city, he turned to the prince, and said, "What news do you bring from Fars? Your progress to our stirrup has been slow."

"By the blessings of Allah," said the prince, "every thing in Fars is well. Your slave travelled post, and his ill destiny has made him arrive too late to meet the Shah's wishes."

This open rebuke, although it hurt the feelings of the prince, did not produce the effect which his uncle expected, that of lowering him in public estimation. On the contrary the effect was reversed, for never was contrast between two individuals so unfavourable to the one, and so advantageous to the other, for in their persons they exhibited the extremes of beauty and deformity; in their minds, of arrogance and humility; in their manners, of harshness and amenity.

This scene passed off, but was duly commented upon throughout the camp and city, such an unanimous feeling of hatred having arisen against the Shah, strengthened by the possession of one who promised such happiness to the country, that but for the constant habit of fear which kept down rebellion, it is likely that Persia would at that moment have thrown off the yoke. One circumstance which strongly encouraged feelings of discontent, was the non-existence of the humpback, whose activity as a spy throughout every department, had made the people cautious of expressing their true sentiments, and whose intrigues had sown distrust between individuals of all ranks. His absence had opened men's hearts and minds, and they now could confess to each other, how impatient they were of the tyranny which oppressed them.

The Shah, on the other hand, felt all he had lost by the death of his servant. Although he had installed Sadek in his office, yet he had not obtained in him what he possessed in the other. Instead of that sharpness of intellect, full of resources in furtherance of its purpose, and which came to conclusions almost by intuition, Sadek possessed but a slow apprehension, neither adapted to the character of a spy or a courtier. When once he had made up a resolution he was firm, nothing could subvert it; but much was required to move him, and although he ever espoused the interests of his master, and served him with fidelity, yet if called upon to be the instrument of injustice, he did not hesitate to resist.

The shock which the prince Fattah Ali had received in the morning, was but trifling to the misery inflicted upon him during the course of this inauspicious day. The Shah, by his conduct at the selam, having prepared both his own and his nephew's mind for scenes of discord, determined to fill up the measure of his woe, by disclosing to him the whole of his misfortune. Accordingly, as the day drew to a close, just before the evening prayer, he called him to the *khelwat* or cabinet. He had prepared it with great attention to effect—he made a display of the implements and officers of punishment in the avenues leading to it. The chamber was dimly lighted, and one less stout-hearted than the prince would probably have sunk with apprehension. But conscious in his integrity, without suspicion, the youth proceeded to his uncle's presence, though but little prepared for the ensuing scene.

"Come forward," said the Shah, as he entered, the Shah being seated in the corner of a small room, lighted up by only two long tapers in the midst, and covered with a cloak of dark colour.

"You have no doubt heard wherefore we have called you to our presence," said he, in a tone very different from what a nephew might expect from so near a relation.

"As I am your sacrifice," said the prince, "the reason has not been made known to me."

"Has no one by the road side hinted the reason of your recall?"

"By the head of the king, no!" he answered. "Not till this very morning was your servant aware that he had incurred the Shah's displeasure. In the administration of his province he has followed every instruction which he has received, and, by the blessing of Allah! the plains which were before uninhabited are now flourishing; the Shah's *maliat*, or revenue, has increased, and owing to the royal wisdom men are happy at Shiraz. If the tardy arrival of your slave is the reason, by the salt of the king, and by the head of the Prophet, I swear that I never tarried longer on the road than to rest myself and horses; that I did not even abide a day at Ispahan, that I did not go to Tehran, where I might have heard some account of my sister, for whom alone I think life worth the keeping, and that I came on in the greatest possible haste, as soon as I heard of the state of the war in Asterabad. What more can your servant say?"

The king sat in silence for some time, uncertain even to the last in what manner to break the horrid intelligence to his nephew. He was disappointed that he entertained not even a suspicion of Amima's death, and found that he had to undergo the whole misery of a first disclosure. At length, crushing every good feeling, which in spite of himself would rise to the surface of his thoughts, he determined to have recourse to his constant refuge in all difficulties of conscience,—to assert the despot and the tyrant.

"The reason of your recall has no reference to the business of government," said the Shah; "upon that head we have nothing to say—but it is one which touches you still nearer. It is the conduct of your sister."

"Allah! Allah!" cried the astonished youth, "what can she have done?"

"Hear!" said the Shah, evidently much agitated, "I have treated you both as my children—you as the heir to my throne—she as the head of my house, my companion, and my confidant. What did I ever keep secret from her? Did she not know my inmost thoughts? Did she not even lead me as a child? Was there a favour which I ever refused her? Had she not her will in every way? and in that most ill-fated event, when she met the unsainted Mazanderani youth, a proceeding which, as—

according to the rules of Mahomedan life, would have carried her condemnation with it in any other harem—did I not forgive her freely, and bury every thing in oblivion?”

“As Mahomed is the prophet of Allah, this is all new to me,” said the astounded Fattah Ali.

“Give ear and have patience,” said the king. “What will you say when I tell you, that notwithstanding this indulgence, in the very face of her duty to me, of her obedience to the injunctions of our holy prophet, she was convicted, (can I find words to say it,) she was convicted of receiving this very Mazanderani in her apartments!”

“That I declare,” roared out the prince in a voice of thunder, “is false! Amima had refused to embrace me, her brother—would she debase herself with one she knew not?”

“Hold, young man,” said the Shah, having been sufficiently roused by the violence of his nephew’s manner; “hear me to the last.”

“What have you done with her?” said the Prince, with a tone in which contempt and tenderness were mingled. “Have ye murdered her?”

“As you value your own life be silent!” said the king, his passions kindling into a flame. “Your sister has paid the forfeit of her crime—she is no more!”

“Curses be on your head! murderer of your own blood!” said the indignant and grief-stricken youth, his words choking his utterance, and leaning against the wall from sudden weakness; “May the maledictions of an orphan fall upon your head! Slayer of my father and your brother, murderer of my sister, add my murder to the list of your crimes, and it will be well!” and without further thought concerning the dreaded man before whom he stood, he turned his back upon him, and left his presence.

The Shah’s excited passion by this time had broken out into one of the most violent paroxysms of a tyrant’s fury—his face was convulsed—his frame shook with rage—words could not issue from his eager mouth. At length the last act of the prince’s contempt, restored him to his *full utterance*; and roaring out in the voice of a demon to

his attendant officers, he said, "Seize him! bind him! Sadek, as you value your life, go thrust that dog's son into utter darkness. By the head of the Shah, we will have revenge! After all, am I not a king?"

With the greatest reluctance, Sadek, accompanied by two ferashes, took the heart-broken prince into custody, at the same time shewing him every respect in their power, whilst he followed without exhibiting the smallest resistance.

The Shah had not been in the least prepared for this result to the conference. He had never conceived it possible that his nephew possessed sufficient strength of character to brave his power, and therefore he was in every way astonished; and when he recollected how popular he was among all ranks, how favourable had been the reception which he had met from his officers and courtiers, he began seriously to reflect that consequences of far greater import to himself than merely a young man's grief at the loss of his sister, might rise up against him, and make that power uncertain which he now wielded with so much uncontrol. He sat in long cogitation at this new feature which his affairs had taken, and the more he reflected upon what had just taken place, the more his passions were roused.

His jealousy, his envy, his indignation, and his desire for revenge, all by turns assailed his miserably-conducted feelings. His first impulse was to get rid of the youth immediately by open violence, reckless of the consequences; his more sober resolutions pointed to prudence and the absence of publicity. Long he thought, and long he remained undecided. At length he determined to delay, in order to ascertain what turn his nephew's feelings would assume after their first ebullition had subsided, ere he came to any ultimate decision on his account. Upon his death he was resolved, but it was only upon how it could best be effected that he was uncertain.

CHAPTER XVII.

Neither slay the soul which God hath forbidden you to slay, unless for a just cause.

KORAN.

The wretched Fattah Ali was inconsolable at the horrid intelligence which had so cruelly been communicated to him. The circumstance which principally afflicted him, was the imputation cast upon his sister's reputation. He had been bred up in the highest respect for the sanctity of the harem, and the honour of women. The love which he had always entertained for his sister, was entwined with such confidence in her purity, that by no stretch of his imagination could he conceive her guilty of the crimes of which his uncle had accused her. There was no one from whom he could seek consolation ; he was debarred from communicating with any of those who professed friendship for him, and in his forlorn situation, the only possible issue from his misfortunes, he saw was death. Sadek alone was allowed to tend upon him, for the Shah was anxious to know whether his nephew had relented, and he had given orders that every word and action should be reported to him. To him the prince freely imparted his feelings. Instead of retracting what he had said to the Shah, his tongue did not cease heaping curses upon his head ; he did not refrain from calling him a fratricide ; a destroyer of his own blood ; a blot in the human race ; a foul and base tyrant ; and when his imagination would allow itself to think upon the agonies which he probably had inflicted upon his sister, he became furious, and was afflicted by the ravings and contortions of a maniac. Sadek's better nature longed to relieve the wretched youth from his misery, intimately acquainted as he was with every part of Amima's history, but he was so fearful lest any thing which he might say, should compromise his own safety with the Shah, that he determined at first to profess ignorance, asserting that every thing had taken place within the walls of the harem, that the *Khajeh Bashi* having been put to death, the whole event was consigned to eternal secrecy.

But he felt it difficult totally to elude the prince's inquiries, who pressed him hard upon every point, first concerning Amima's acquaintance with Zohrab, next as to the possibility of his entering the harem, then upon the nature of the discovery, and lastly upon her death. To all this Sadek at first pretended ignorance; but the prince knowing that Mariam was his sister's attendant, he would not let him rest until he had sifted every particular. At length the inflexibility of the man gave way before the urgent entreaties of the youth, and as far as he could with prudence, he gave as detailed a narrative as possible of what had befallen her, in which he made a full exposition of her innocence.

To the admirers of genuine feeling, it would have afforded much delight to witness the conduct of the prince upon hearing this intelligence; a load appeared to have been withdrawn from his breast; his features gradually brightened up; tears streamed from his eyes; and when he was assured, that though death had been her fate, yet that no imputation could be attached to her, he rushed to his informant, and almost embracing his knees, exclaimed, "Blessings on you for this! you have raised a poor wretch from hell to heaven. Let death come now; and I shall die content. The sooner the odious tyrant strikes the better; go, go, tell him so! Tell him he is the murderer of innocence, and that I defy him to do me more harm, than to add my death to the catalogue of his crimes."

Sadek hastened to take advantage of this permission to go, for he felt that in a few minutes more he would have confessed every thing. The affecting situation of the prince had so worked upon his nature, rude and reserved as it was, that in order to give him the comfort which he so much required, he would have told him of his sister's safety; but had he done so, he knew the consequences would probably be fatal to himself, as well as to those whom he had saved; he therefore determined to do all in his power to prevent the king from coming to extremities with his nephew, and for that purpose armed himself with more than usual patience, determined to bear with the king's wrath and ill humour to the utmost; and more than all, he was resolved rather to sacrifice

his own life, than again to be made the instrument of taking away that of one so innocent as the prince.

In the morning the Shah called him in attendance earlier than usual, desirous to know whether his nephew continued in the same mood as on the evening before. Sadek, anxious to screen himself from violence, endeavoured to place his situation in the best possible point of view; he described the violence of his grief, shewed how necessary it was to give him time to recover the severity of the blow, and assured the king that he himself would be guarantee that the prince would in time be as docile to his wishes as ever. This temporizing plan did not, however, meet the Shah's views; he never forgot injurious words, and he remembered too well all that had been said on the preceding evening, to pass so easily from wrath to forgiveness. Besides, he did not in the least relish the tone of apology and exculpation which Sadek had adopted in the prince's favour. All the jealousy of his nature was roused, because he thought in that tone he could read the feeling of the public. Suspicion alone of that nature would have been fatal to any one, but how much more to him who now stood forward in some measure as his rival!

He determined himself to ascertain the state of his nephew's mind, and therefore peremptorily ordered him to appear. The interview was almost a repetition of what passed on the preceding evening. Instead of expressing contrition for the expressions he had used, the prince, apprised as he had been of his sister's innocence, was now only more severe in his remarks upon the Shah's barbarity. The feelings of horror which more or less had always filled his breast against his uncle, although he had hitherto repressed them, now broke out in full violence; and so entirely did he rouse the Shah's passions that, but for the despot's prudence, which in the midst of wrath he ever preserved, the prince would at that moment have paid the forfeit of his life. The Shah ordered him from his presence with all the instances of ignominy which attend a common malefactor, and for the present, contracting his rage within his own breast, he said nothing. However, he fully made up his mind *rather to leave his throne without a successor, than to*

make the actual possession of it insecure, and death, in his mind, was the sealed fate of the unfortunate prince.

Again he sought the assistance of Sadek, for in him he hoped to possess an ever ready instrument of his vengeance. Seated in his own private apartment, he ordered every one to leave the room, excepting Sadek; and then, with that look of mystery and ominous import which he could put on upon sanguinary occasions, he said :

"Sadek, my liver is turned into blood—the king's name is trampled upon. This must not be—Fatteh Ali dies."

Sadek stood like one petrified, and kept a profound silence.

"Did you hear?" said the Shah, "from thee the Shah requires his blood."

Upon these words, this naturally impassive man fell rudely and boldly at the Shah's feet, and said, "Your slave is too great a lover of his Shah to commit such an act. Let the Shah kill him, but let him stay his hand from the blood of the innocent youth."

"*Ahi*, is it so?" said the mortified and disappointed king. "Is a slave, a base reptile like thee, to tell us what we are to do. Begone, we thought better of thy fidelity. Go!"

Upon this Sadek slowly and respectfully taking his leave, the Shah was left totally alone, to chew the cud of his reflections; and bitter indeed they were, when he reflected that possibly he might be surrounded with disaffected servants. He determined himself to become a closer observer of the times than he had yet been, and as the public *selam* was always a ceremony in which the good or bad feeling towards himself might be detected, he determined that very day to make some experiments upon the temper of his courtiers.

When he came to his musnud at the usual noontide, casting his eyes about him he was surprised to find the court most thinly attended, the principal officers present being the chief executioner, his deputy, the chief of the tent pitchers, and two or three of the priesthood of Astarabad. He inquired for the prime Vizir, and found that he was absent owing to sickness. The general of

his body guard had been called to an out-post, an alarm having been given of some approaching Turcomans; the chief of the *tuffenkchis* was reviewing the troops; Shir Khan had fallen from his horse, and the *zamburckchi bashi* had been taken up in remodelling the corps under his charge. Several others were absent upon one pretext or another, and the ranks of his courtiers were filled up by inferior officers, *kethodas* of the town and governors of villages. Casting his eyes about he perceived a poor wretch of a *kethoda*, who had been forced to appear, but who stood aloof, fearful of showing himself, because he wore neither *chakchurs*, the red cloth stockings, or a shawl to his cap. The Shah's rage was roused at being thus neglected, and when he perceived this man its whole violence broke out. Having been brought before him, he exclaimed: "Son of a dog! is it thus you dare to come before the Shah? Are we thus small, to eat the dirt of an ass? Another time you will learn to come into our presence with a befitting dress. Upon which the *ferashes* were ordered to administer the bastinado upon the soles of his feet, whilst the Shah, brooding over the insult, which he thought was intentional, was confirmed in his suspicions, and soon broke up the court, in order the better to reflect upon the steps to be taken.

When restored to the solitude of his chamber, his conclusions led him to the certainty that disaffection prevailed, and that unless he struck some blow of consequence, his throne stood on the brink of a precipice. He pondered much upon Sadek's conduct; for he argued, that if a worm like him had ventured to turn upon him, example of resistance must have been set by others. Drawing forth from under the pillow where he sat the *calemdûn** usually deposited there, with a roll of paper, on a slip he entered a list of those whom he determined to destroy, at the head of which he inscribed the name of Sadek, adding his assistant the young Hussein, being determined to change those servants who were immediately about the person. He then inscribed others whose influence was prejudicial to him. Hajji Ibrahim, his vizir, he also added and then erased, as wishing still to acquire some

* A small painted case containing pens and ink.

further conviction of his disaffection. The prince's name was separate from the others.

Scarcely had he finished this when Sadek, according to custom, opened the door and stood before him. Taken unawares, he hastily put his note under the pillow, and in doing this exhibited a confusion, which struck Sadek as an act so uncommon, that suspicions rose in his mind that something affecting himself was passing in the Shah's mind. At that moment the chief executioner also entered, and stood before the king. Although under other circumstances he would probably have been received with some offensive expression, yet now the Shah saw him appear with pleasure, for he felt that that officer's assistance would be of the first consequence, and he determined to treat him with kindness in order to secure his co-operation. But aware how much he was controlled by his daughter Zulma, he thought proper to consult her, and accordingly ordered him immediately to announce to her that it was his intention to visit her on that very evening.

At about an hour before the evening prayer, he proceeded almost unattended to the harem. As soon as the king was seated, Zulma standing before him, he said,

"You and your father, Zulma, of all my servants, are those upon whom the Shah places most dependance. Certain events have occurred in which we require all your devotion. We are not pleased with the services of some: it is necessary that they be put away."

Zulma, whose ambition was roused by this confidential tone, humbled herself in proportion as she expected to be elevated, and made repeated assertions of her devotion to the Shah's commands, and of her own as well as of her father's readiness to execute all he should ordain.

"First, said the Shah, "it will be necessary to dispose of the prisoner Zohrab. To-morrow we ordain that he be exposed and humiliated in the eyes of the city, and then he dies."

"As I am your sacrifice," said Zulma, a pang darting involuntarily through her whole frame at this disclosure, "did not the asylum of the world say that he would defer punishment until Tehran—"

"If you, too, Zulma," said the Shah, "his anger being

roused at this contradiction ; "if you thwart my wishes, the king's countenance will be turned from you for ever. Obey without a word, and the highest honours are preparing for you and your father. Refuse—and ye sink never to rise again."

Zulma was silenced, and, flattered by a disclosure which gave fresh impulse to her ambition, she submitted to smother every other feeling, and to become the instrument of the Shah's wishes.

"Hear, then," said the king. "The Shah will order thy father to exhibit the prisoner Zohrab to the city to-morrow : his humiliation shall be proportioned to his arrogance. Let the whole gang of ferashes and executioners be in readiness. Let him be mounted on an ass with the tail in his hand. A crier shall go before, exclaiming—'This is he who would be a king.' Ferashes and executioners shall spit in his face and buffet him, and others shall be invited to do the same. He shall then be impaled—and Allah have mercy on his soul !

This horrid sentence visibly worked upon Zulma's feelings, and her tongue was on the point of interceding for the wretched victim ; but in the mood she saw the king, she judged it wiser to refrain, and in silent acquiescence bowed her head before his orders.

"But," said the Shah, "ere this take place we have a more urgent call for thy obedience. Ere to-morrow's dawn another deed must be performed. Knowest thou Sadek ?"

At this name, Zulma's whole attention was roused, for she was greatly jealous of the influence which Sadek exercised over the king, an influence which she never ceased devising some mode of lessening.

"Your slave knows full well who he is," said she ; "whatever the Shah ordains she is ready to obey."

"Thy father must use all caution in approaching him, and the deed must be done with secrecy. He must suspect nothing—he must attend upon our person to-night as usual, and to-morrow morning, ere the sun is on the horizon, he must sleep in the grave. Prepare thy father with thy council, and let the Shah be satisfied that his confidence in thee has been well placed. *To-morrow we shall disclose more ; but this is urgent, and*

any delay will bring upon thee the Shah's vengeance." Upon this he rose and departed, leaving the bewildered maiden in a state of such excitement, that she felt as if she herself had been elevated to the throne of Persia.

Whilst this was going on, Sadek had been greatly disturbed by suspicion and fear. The Shah's confusion at seeing him had struck his mind as so uncommon, that for a long while he sat in deep meditation, turning over the various causes which might have induced it. He saw that his own refusal to lend himself to the prince's death, had excited the king's anger, and as that was the first time in which he had ventured to disobey, it was to that circumstance he turned his whole thoughts. Full of conjecture, and anticipating the loss of the king's favour and of his situation near the person, he proceeded to the performance of his daily duty, that of preparing the king's carpet for evening prayer, with a heavy heart and mind foreboding evil. He approached the spot which the king had so recently occupied, in order to refashion the cushion against which he rested. In turning it over, his eyes fell upon a slip of paper, the very slip which he had seen in the king's hand at the moment of his confusion, and which he had thrust under the cushion with so much haste. His natural curiosity would have led him to inspect it, had nothing intervened to make it an object of interest; but now he seized upon it with avidity. What was his surprise when the first word which struck his sight was his own name, written by the Shah's own hand. It stood at the head of a list, over which he quickly glanced; but so entirely was he taken up with his own name, that his eyes swam in his head from apprehension. Hussein's name, his fellow in office, stood immediately after his own. It soon recurred to him that upon a former occasion, when the Shah had discovered a conspiracy, with his own hand he had made out a list of those to be put to death, and that he had adhered to the sentence, which he had then passed, with a resolution as fixed as destiny. Sadek was a man of courage, of great personal strength, and resolute of purpose. His mind was soon made up. Having remained

for some minutes in an attitude so fixed that no statue ever stood firmer, he at length rose with the whole plan formed in his mind. He determined to save his own life and to slay the king. He argued thus. "God has given to each of us one life—more to a king he hath not given than to the smallest reptile of the desert;—why, then, should mine not be as valuable to me as the king's is to him? Allah has directed me to this paper as to a beacon to ensure my safety. Sadek shall not turn back from this, happen what may." But few are the instances in which a man comes to a resolution of such importance without the support and encouragement of an accomplice, and as he felt great friendship for his youthful assistant Hussein, he determined to save his life in making him share the enterprise.

He quitted the Shah's apartments, after having prepared every thing for his accustomed evening prayer, and having carefully deposited the paper in the very spot in which he had found it. He then sought out Hussein, whose thoughts were taken up with any thing but the awful event which the more solemn Sadek held in contemplation. Luckily for the latter, nature had imprinted upon his features such unvarying sameness, that no one could discern that aught was working in his mind of more import than usual, and fortunate was it that such was the case: since, called upon as he would be to appear again before the king ere the perpetration of the deed, no suspicion would arise in the royal breast from the inspection of his looks.

"Come here, O boy," said Sadek to Hussein; "I have something to say which will drive all life from your head. Be serious and listen."

"If it be the report," now going about, said Hussein, that Zohrab Khan, that unfortunate, is to be executed to-morrow, I have heard it."

"Zohrab Khan's death, indeed!" said Sadek; "what are you speaking of? look a little nearer home, and you will discover—"

"What say ye—home! You cannot be speaking of our prince, whom Allah take into his keeping?" said Hussein.

"Nearer still," said Sadek.

"In the name of the Prophet, what?" answered the alarmed youth.

Sadek then took him by the arm, and in the most impressive manner related the whole circumstance of the paper found under the cushion, having prefaced his communication by a description of the scenes which had taken place—first, of his refusal to murder the prince, then of the Shah's confusion at his sudden appearance.

The cheeks of his youthful auditor were blanched with fear as he heard the narrative; but when he was told that his own name stood second on the proscribed list, his knees knocked under him, and his teeth chattered in his head. He could scarcely gather any courage from the nerve of his companion; for it never had entered his mind that so desperate an action as killing a king could be conceived, much less executed, by a common thing called a man, and that man a slave. But when he witnessed the steady resolution of Sadek; when he heard his plan of attack, and saw how easily the deed might be done without danger, to either, he slowly yielded his assent.

The hour of evening prayer was drawing nigh, and the moment of action was at hand. Sadek determined not to lose sight of Hussein for a moment, lest the timidity of youth might mar his scheme; and, above all, he was anxious to keep him from the presence of the king, certain, as he was that he could not preserve a proper steadiness of countenance, so necessary in the critical position of their affairs.

The Shah, having returned from his visit to Zulma, received as usual the several officers of state with whom business was to be transacted, and when Sadek appeared in his proper place, in the usual discharge of his office, the king spoke to him with a kindness of tone so totally new, that at once every suspicion was doubly confirmed, and he wanted no further proof to be certain that the king had signed his death-warrant. He was well versed in the treachery of his smile, and when kindness of tone and manner were superadded, nothing more was necessary to put him entirely on his guard.

The Shah, not seeing Hussein at his post, inquired where he was, when Sadek asserted that he had the heart-

ache (the usual mode in Persia of saying one is ill,) which only called forth more expressions of kindness, upon hearing which the rough Sadek could scarcely prevent his unexpressive eye from casting a glance of contempt at the false-tongued tyrant. And when the hour of prayer was come, the exclamations of holy fervour which came from the Shah, were so much louder and so much more emphathetic than usual, that upon any other occasion Sadek might have concluded that the heart of the king had been touched by the miseries inflicted upon the now prostrate city, and that apparently one so pious was devising nothing but good.

The day drew to its close; the usual watch was set on the walls and turrets of the Ark, and nothing took place which could in the least have made Sadek suspect that his own death was in contemplation, excepting one circumstance. This was the sight of a man prowling near the room in which he slept—a man he knew, who was never employed by the chief executioner excepting on desperate occasions. He could give no very good account of himself when questioned by Sadek; but his appearance gave the finishing stroke to his determination, and armed his hand with a nerve that nothing could shake.

The king retired to bed at the usual hour. The room in which he passed the night was admirably adapted to encourage Sadek in his undertaking. It was situated in a court, surrounded by high walls, separate from the great mass of the palace, and rather difficult of approach, the court being entered by a small gate which was barred at night. Sadek and Hussein slept in a *cufsh khaneh*, a smaller inner room, whilst a lamp was kept burning in the very room in which the king slept. The king could scarcely turn himself without being heard, and it was death if they disturbed his slumbers.

Whilst Sadek was performing the operation of taking off his garments, preparatory to bed, the king entered into conversation with him in a manner totally unusual; and with a kindness of tone, which perhaps might have softened any heart but Sadek's, said to him—

“You have heard the fate of that ill-advised Zohrab; to-morrow will put an end to all his vain projects of ambition, and his death will seal the fate of his rebellion.”

"As I am your sacrifice, yes," said Sadek.

"What has become of thy sister, Sadek?" said the Shah. "We have lost sight of her."

"Your slave thinks that she fled to the Turcomans, with Zohrab Khan's mother," said Sadek.

"Ah! is it so?" said the Shah; "then it is well.—We have ordered that that unfortunate woman should no longer be molested, and she may be permitted to sit under the shadow of our throne: the Shah wars not with women. Let thy sister partake of our clemency," said the king.

"May the shadow of the asylum of the universe never be less," said Sadek, quite alive to this extension of the royal forgiveness, and almost forgetting the desperate deed he was about to perform. "Your slave kisses the hem of your garment."

"Who is that?" said the Shah, giving ear to a noise which heard at the gate of the court. "Who goes there."

"As I am your sacrifice," said Sadek, "Hussein, your slave, is barring the gate."

"Go tell him to unbar it; be it left open to night; 'tis possible that reports may be made to the Shah of the state of the public mind preparatory to to-morrow's execution."

"Your slave then will sleep across the Shah's threshold," said Sadek, suppressing a look of ferocity which had lighted up his features, and again repossessed by his full determination, having heard this additional confirmation of the fate awarded him by his treacherous master.

"Do so," said the Shah. "Thou art a good servant; *inshallah!* the king will make thy face white to eternity, and thy head touch the skies."

"Your slave is grateful for all the Shah's kindness," said Sadek; "but whose dog is he, that the Shah should take notice of him?" Upon saying which he managed to place the king's dagger and sword, which were usually close to his bed head, at some distance, which the king perceiving, suspicion lighting up his animated eye, exclaimed,

"Why do ye place them there, man? Why do ye change their position?"

"As I am your sacrifice," said Sadek, with infinite presence of mind, "when your slave sleeps upon your threshold, it is always the custom to change their position."

"Is it so?" said the king, apparently satisfied with the reason, and allowed the change to be made. Nothing more being required, Sadek helped the king to his repose, (the last before the grave!) and in taking his leave he fixed the lamp in a position favourable to his purpose, and took so accurate a survey of the relative situation of every object in the room, that he knew at once whither to direct his steps.

He then returned to Hussein, whose state of nervousness almost amounted to madness, so little prepared was he to be an actor in the tragedy. A small lamp burnt in their room, by the light of which Sadek, with a gloomy determination overspreading his features, inspected the fatal dagger (a long Georgian *khanjar* made of highest tempered steel) which was to seal the fate of the despot. Not daring to speak, scarcely to breathe, they communicated to each other by signs. They did not take off their clothes; both had prepared themselves for immediate flight as soon as the deed was over, and horses were ready saddled waiting for them at a moment's notice.

The hour of midnight, for which they had been watching with nervous expectation, at length was announced by the sentinels on the city walls, and then indeed their courage was put to the test. Sadek's rose in proportion as Hussein's fell. The youth was scarcely alive, still he kept as steady a countenance as he could, and looked at his dagger. Sadek arose, and trimmed the waning lamp, his face exhibiting to the timid Hussein features full of stern resolution. "*Biah*, come! *wakt shoud!* It is his time," said Sadek.

"One minute," said Hussein, his heart totally failing him. At that moment they heard an audible sigh from the Shah. "In the name of the Prophet, what's that," said the youth.

"Come on," said Sadek fiercely, "otherwise thy heart shall feel this," brandishing his awful weapon in his face. He then led on, and slowly opening the door of the Shah's apartment, entered without making the least noise; but Hussein, in his excessive agitation, stumbled over the high threshold, and awoke the King.

"What's that?" exclaimed his shrill voice. "Who goes there?" After that he immediately rose, and seating himself upright in his bed he perceived Sadek.

"Sadek!" roared he, "what do you seek?" and at once perceiving his intention he exclaimed, "Stop! or ye die,"

"Die yourself," said Sadek; "I come for thy blood ere thou takest mine."

"I'll give you all you ask," said the king, groping about for his arms. "I am your king! all ye desire take."

"We want nothing but justice," said Sadek, "and this it is," upon which he aimed a deadly blow at the king, which he parried with his arm; the king then raised his voice, and seeking safety in flight around the room, he dodged his assassin with considerable dexterity. He had just seized his sword, when Sadek, watching his opportunity, plunged his dagger in the very inmost recesses of his heart. He fell and as the stream of life flowed rapidly from the gaping wound, all he could articulate was, "I am the Shah—I—I—Shah—Shah—" And thus fell the scourge of Persia's fair kingdom, and of her soft and thoughtless sons.

At the sight of the breathless bloody corpse, Hussein actually sunk on the ground with dismay, and covered his face with his hands; whilst Sadek scarcely giving himself time to cast a thought on the vicissitudes which had thus destroyed one who swayed over millions, sat doggedly to work to complete his task. He first sought for the fatal list in the pockets of the Shah, which he found; he then calmly severed the head from the body, wrapped it in a napkin, and pinned the list thereupon; then taking it up in one hand, whilst he covered himself over with a cloak with the other, he left the apartment. Hussein followed him almost mechanically, scarcely knowing what he did. When they had quitted the palace, which they did unsuspected, being known to belong to the Shah, Sadek said to Hussein, "Now open thine eyes, say thanks to Allah for saving thy life, take to thy steed, and as ye would serve thy preserver, ride as if life and death depended upon thy exertions to the black tents of the Yamoot. Seek out Zohrab's mother, Mariam,

the young Ali, and tell them to speed hitherwards with all haste. The Shah is dead and Fattah Ali reigns."

Hussein now fully restored to his senses did as he was ordered, and Sadek took his own road through the city.

CHAPTER XVIII.

He arose one morning, and lo! he found himself a king.

VICISSITUDES OF HUMAN LIFE.

The road from the apartments of the Shah, where the bloody deed had been committed, to the entrance gate of the palace, lay immediately in front of the small court and chamber in which the prince Fattah Ali was confined. Of this Sadek possessed the key, and was the sole guardian. Passing it, his heart smote him when he thought upon the wretched and disconsolate situation of the youth, and it struck him that he might announce to him the change in his fortunes now about to take place, in a manner which would not compromise himself, but shorten the torments of the prince.

He therefore slept aside, and slowly opening the gate, he proceeded without making the least noise to the very door of the apartment where the prince lay.

Fattah Ali was wrapt in a sound sleep, slight groans ever and anon breaking from his wretched bosom, when of a sudden he heard these words—"Fattah Ali—Fattah Ali—the Shah dies—thy sister lives—render thanks to Allah!" awoke in a tremour, and seating himself upright on his mattress, he listened with all his ears, hoping to hear something more. He thought he heard a noise, and eagerly exclaimed—"Who goes there, in the name of the Prophet?" but nobody answered. The silence which ensued was as profound as the darkness, and after much anxious thought and expectation, he resigned himself to his pillow again, and with a deep sigh concluded that he had been tantalized by some passing dream.

Sadek, in the mean while, made his way good through the gates of the palace and the Ark, and straightway sought the habitation of the Grand Vizir. It was a house that had belonged to one of the proscribed omrahs of the city, and as Sadek was well known to be the Shah's confidential servant, who frequently was the bearer of messages at all hours of the night, he was freely permitted to pass on to where the Vizir slept. Here also he slowly entered the room, and depositing the horrible burthen which he bore, the bloody head, just within the threshold, he as quietly withdrew. No observation was made by the attendants—the night had still much to run, and the city was wrapt up in as much repose, as if peace reigned and crime was unknown.

Having thus fulfilled the measure of his awful destiny, this man of desperate resolution, and though of crime an avenger of his oppressed country, sought his steed, and taking his departure from the gates of the city, was soon lost in the darkness of the forest, never more to be seen among those who had long known him as their friend and companion.

At an earlier hour than usual, when the first glimmering of day was scarcely sufficient to pierce through the heavy curtain which covered the outside of the window of the Grand Vizir's room, the minister opened his eyes. He, too, thought that some unusual noise had taken place while he slept, and strange visions had passed through his brain, an event unusual to one who was well known for the soundness of his intellect. It appeared to him that something about the folds of the curtain of his door was different to what he remembered before he composed himself to sleep, and looking lower he saw a substance which, owing to the darkness, he could not define; but his eyes remaining fixed upon it, little by little he thought that it resolved itself into some well-known shape—that it resembled a human head! Then, with more certainty, he was almost sure that he could trace the eyes, then the nose, then the mouth; but as the certainty increased he turned himself about, deriding his own credulity, and scouting the idea of so strange a vision. Again he looked and again he saw a head, and what is more, the features assumed an expression well known; and, ah! too

horrible to think, he thought the Shah himself was staring at him. He covered himself over with the bed-clothes, as if to shake off so hideous a vision, and remained thus for some time, determining within himself to forget it; but now that the day dawned bright, and that he again cast his eyes that way, who can describe his looks of surprise and horror—who give an idea of the terror which possessed him, when what he had imagined as a vision of the brain become a reality, and that the head which he imagined watching over the interests of the kingdom was a lifeless mass before him. He roared out to his attendants to appear, in a voice which, that hour they had never heard, and they rushed in to his assistance, expecting to have found him assailed by an assassin; but when their eyes caught a sight of the horrible and ghastly object, all their energies forsook them, and they stood as if they were paralyzed. Expressions of horror and amazement burst from both master and servants. "Who has done this?" cried one. "What ashes have fallen upon our heads?" said another. "The Shah is dead!" whispered a third, a thrill of joy running through his frame at the same time. "Have the *dives* and *gins* been at work this night?" said the Vizir; "but see, see, what is that paper; perhaps some news may enlighten our brain."—Upon that one of the servants picked it up with great caution, and gave it his master.

"As I live," said the Vizir, "it is in the Shah's own hand!"

When he had well examined it, and particularly when he saw whose name was affixed at the top of the list, the mystery was cleared up, and immediately he understood the whole transaction. Strictly keeping his own council, he carefully put the paper into his breast, and having inquired whether any one had entered the house that night, none present could answer the question; but upon inquiry it was known at the gate that Sadek had, and had made a pretext of business with the minister.

The Vizir enjoined secrecy to every one present, and instantly dressing himself mounted his horse and proceeded to the palace. He found all the officers of the household at their posts, totally unconscious of the event, and

although it was unusual to see the prime minister so early on foot, yet as their wayward master frequently transacted business at the most uncertain hours, they were in no manner surprised to see him, and freely admitted him. He had ordered the head to be brought after him, and accompanied only by its bearer, he fearfully entered the apartment in which the Shah had slept. We have dwelt too long upon horrors to aim at giving description of the sight which struck the Vizir at his entrance. His was a mind deeply and impressively to reflect upon the vicissitudes of this world's vanities, as he gazed upon the corpse of his late sovereign, whom but the night before he had quitted enjoying the fullness of his power, as unsuspecting of the lot which awaited him, as were those whom he had himself doomed to a sudden and unprepared death.

The Vizir's first act was to take possession of the king's seals, which were carried in a small inner pocket, and then depositing the head near the body, he closed the doors, and directed a guard to be placed, until he should issue further orders. He then ordered a convocation of all the principal officers of state, of the chief priests and elders of the city, to meet in the great hall of audience of the palace, whilst he himself proceeded where the prince was held in confinement.

It was still early in the day, and Fatteh Ali had scarcely performed his morning devotions, when the Vizir entered the room. He was seated most dejectedly on the corner of his carpet, ruminating over what he religiously believed to have been a dream, and started with surprise at seeing who his visitor was, at so unusual an hour.

"How is this?" said he, "our eyes are enlightened! My fortunes are on the rise, that my master should visit his pupil thus early."

He was still more surprised when he saw the Vizir approach with the same degree of respect that he observed to the Shah himself, and kneeling down at his feet touch the ground with his forehead.

"What mockery is this?" said the youth.

"May the hours of the king of kings be fortunate!" said the old man, affected even to tears, "Fatteh Ali Shah is now the sovereign of Irân. Thy uncle sleeps the sleep of the grave."

"Allah, Allah!" exclaimed the bewildered youth.— "Is this still a dream, or am I indeed awake? What does this mean? Why come you thus to torture the unfortunate? If the king requires my life, take it—but do not add insult to my misery."

The Vizir then in a few words explained the catastrophe of his uncle's death, and in confirmation presented the paper containing the names of those, who but for this event would have been the victims of the tyrant's suspicions.

"Ah," said Fatteh Ali, his eye glancing over it, "in my uncle's own hand." He read it in silence, the colour forsaking his cheeks, as the various emotions which it excited filled his breast. He came to the name which had been inserted and then erased. "As I live," said the youth to the Vizir, "here is your name."—and at the very termination, standing rather apart from the others, with a peculiar stroke under it, he found his own. "Allah, Allah!" said he in a solemn ejaculation, "the destinies of thy creatures are in thy hands! Vain, O man! are thy resolves, when the God of our creation has issued his own almighty decrees! But for this, and Fatteh Ali were numbered with the dead; but for this, and the angel of death would have visited him, and the recording angels made up the account of his life. And thou, too, good old man! the loss of my life would have been of little consequence compared with thine, who by thy wisdom maketh millions of thy fellow-creatures to prosper. We must put up our thanks to God for this deliverance, and let this awful lesson make us both humbler and better."

Nothing could be more impressive than the words and manner of this young prince, a worthy pupil of so excellent a minister, and he would long have indulged in the serious turn of his thoughts, had not Hajji Ibrahim reminded him that it was necessary he should attend the convocation about to assemble, to whom an explanation of the sudden and awful event should be made, whilst he would be presented to them as their future sovereign.

It would be in vain to attempt to describe the various emotions which filled the breast of the young and ardent prince, as he left his place of confinement, and issued *into the enjoyment of life, secure from the caprice of a*

tyrant, and possessor of one of the most brilliant thrones of Asia. The suddenness of the transition was almost too much for him to bear, and his mind staggered to and fro, with the same unsteadiness and confusion of vision, as that of a drunkard full of strong drink. But as he walked slowly onward of a sudden he stopped, and exclaimed, "But in the name of the prophet, one half only of my nightly vision has been accomplished, what has become of the other half? I was told that my sister lived." He then related to his companion how he had been awakened, and recited the very words, which he now could swear had been uttered by a human voice. The Vizir suggested that the voice most probably was Sadek's, for the whole circumstances of that man's career favoured that suggestion. His devotedness to the Shah, and at the same time his love for the prince and his sister—his having been the supposed instrument of her death, as he had been that of their father's—his mysterious and reserved manner, and his honest and uncompromising severity of character—every thing led him to suppose as well to hope that he might have pretended to execute the Shah's commands, at the same that he might have saved the victims from their extreme rigour—and with this he concluded that time alone would work out the mystery which hung over Amima's fate, and that nothing that could be done could at all hasten its disclosure. Indeed, he issued immediate orders, that an active search should be made for Sadek, as well as Hussein; but when it was ascertained that they had early left the gates of the city, mounted upon the choicest of the king's horses, he felt that any attempt to overtake them would be in vain. But the hope, the lively and well-sounded hope, which now animated the prince, that his sister might be restored to him, gave such a buoyancy to his spirits, and so filled his heart with every sensation of joy and expectation, that he could scarcely give up his thoughts to the awful ceremony of taking upon him the reins of government which was awaiting him, and could think of nothing but becoming the protector and companion of his beloved Amima.

It was only at this moment that the image of the imprisoned and condemned Zohrab crossed the mind of the Grand Vizir. He would at that instant have run to throw

open the gates of his prison, and to cast off his fetters;—but it was necessary first to attend to his more urgent duty, and he promised himself the luxury of performing that act of justice, as soon as he should have secured to his pupil the lawful throne of his inheritance, and gladdened the hearts of the oppressed country, by substituting, for the tyrant and the blood-drinker, one who promised to heal all their wounds, and to become their benefactor as he had become their king.

Already was the court of the great hall of audience filled, for an undefined report of the death of the Shah had early got abroad, and spread like the wind from one end of the city to the other; and already, in addition to the usual great officers of state, had the body of the Astera-bad ullemah, headed by their chief priests, collected themselves. The musnud alone was vacant, and the Grand Vizir not at his post.

Every eye was turned towards the door through which the tyrant usually entered, and the assembled crowd could scarcely believe that he was not again to appear, when the curtain being thrown up, instead of that terror-inspiring face, that hard countenance full of deadly import, appeared the graceful form of the young prince, full of youthful diffidence and modesty, attended by his aged and much revered minister. Every countenance brightened up; a low hum of joy and applause instinctively broke forth; when the prince came forward, and presented himself to their joyful welcomes. Instead of seating himself at once on the musnud, he took his place at a lower spot, whilst the Vizir stood before him.

The Grand Vizir then addressed the Nakeeb Shah, one of the nobles to whom the late king usually spoke on public days, and informed him, in a full and detailed manner, of the death of Aga Mohammed Shah, making no comments, but using the reverential forms of words common to oriental phraseology on such an occasion, and then stated that his nephew, Fatteh Ali, became his successor, both as the natural heir to the throne, as well as in virtue of the intention of the late king.

He then called upon the chief priest to ascend into the hall, in order to gird the sword of state on the king's person, as is usual on such occasions, until the ultimate

and more solemn ceremony should be performed in the prescribed forms in the capital, by the *Mushtehed* of the kingdom. This was done with all the proper acclamations; and the astrologer of the court having announced that a favourable conjunction of the planets was then taking place, nothing more was necessary to add to the universal joy. As soon as this ceremony was performed, and the king seated on the musnud, the *Fatteh* was chaunted forth in the usual manner by the finest voice at court, in which the titles of the new king were announced; and then public enthusiasm no longer being restrained, long and repeated shouts of joy resounded throughout the courts of the palace, and were re-echoed in succession from one end of the city to the other. And, indeed, what joy could be more sincere? The feeling was that of a reprieve from death—of the knocking off the chains of a prisoner, or of the return of an exile to the enjoyments of home and country. It was then that execrations burst forth against the fallen king, that his name was branded with every odious epithet so prolific in the mouth and in the language of Persia, and that his successor's good qualities were extolled, as partaking of more than human excellence.

The shouts of joy which accompanied the installation of the new Shah, were heard with astonishment and apprehension by Zulma in the harem. She had scarcely closed her eyes during this celebrated night, so anxious had she been to put into execution the Shah's commands to superintend the death of Sadek, and she was waiting with the greatest impatience the return of the assassin to report the perpetration of the deed, when the noise of exultation struck her ears, and put her conjectures on the rack. "What can this mean," said she, "Joy in the courts of the Shah! this cannot be! Such things are unknown; something has taken place!" She could scarcely refrain from running herself to the scene of action, so totally at a loss was she to account for what struck her ears. At length a knocking at the harem gate was heard, and the murderous wretch, who had received her orders in furtherance of the Shah's commands, and whom she expected to appear brandishing the head of her rival, returned all aghast at the change which had

taken place. She at first would not credit the intelligence; she would have driven him away as a liar—as a coward excusing his pusillanimity; but her father soon confirmed all, and disclosed to her the destruction of every scheme of ambition which her too ardent imagination might have formed. She sat for some moments uttering no other words than “The Shah is dead! the Shah is dead!” as if that one fact had never been placed among the possibilities of her future destinies, and then all her faculties appeared to be so stunned by disappointment, that she remained long absorbed in gloomy silence. Every dream, either of love or ambition, which had passed through her mind, seemed now so totally dissipated, and the realities of her situation appeared before her in such strong relief, that she could foresee nothing more brilliant for herself than resuming her former station of daughter of the chief executioner, the superintendent of ferashes, and the chief person among men of violence. But, in the middle of all this despondency, a thought struck her, and she determined to act upon it instantly: she recollected that Zohrab was still a prisoner, that she still might have access to him, and that perhaps she might yet secure a share in his affections, before she was again thrown back upon herself and her family. She accordingly hastened to put on her veil, and gave orders that the guardian of Zohrab’s prison should attend her.

Some time elapsed ere this arrangement could take place, and she was about leaving the harem, when she was detained by observing a crowd of the royal servants and officers pursuing the very path which she intended to tread; and shortly after the young king himself, accompanied by the Grand Vizir, appeared surrounded by a brilliant cortege of courtiers, whose happy faces and easy carriage strongly spoke of the great change which had taken place. She retired within her apartments to ruminate over her miseries, whilst the procession passed on.

The ceremony of the temporary installation having terminated, the Grand Vizir did not lose a moment in bringing the situation of the prisoner Zohrab to the king’s recollection, and requested his permission to go forthwith and procure his release. Fattah Ali, with all the

warmth and enthusiasm of youth, acceded to the proposal with unfeigned joy, and moreover expressed a wish that he too might have the pleasure of seeing his fetters knocked off. Zohrab in fact had from his earliest boyhood been the idol of his admiration. His feats of daring and hardihood, like those of the heroes in the *Shah-nameh*, had excited his emulation, whilst his acts of generosity and mildness had exalted him into the character of one of the mussulman's most revered Imans. Frequently had his imagination been enchanted by the supposititious loves of this brave youth and his sister, and to such a degree, that he had indulged his poetic vein (for which in common with his countrymen he was famous) by writing the loves of Amima and Zohrab, in imitation of those of Ferhad and Shireen. When he heard how deeply they were enamoured with each other, far from feeling any resentment or jealousy, their misfortunes, and the checks which were opposed to their love, only gave him more materials for weaving the thread of his romance, and now that he was called upon to act as the arbiter of their future destinies, it may be conceived with what delight he acceded to the Grand Vizir's proposal, and how eagerly he desired to become personally known to one who had so long held a share in his affections.

Zohrab, during the late events, had passed his time in dragging on a wretched existence, hourly expecting to be called upon to meet his fate. His fine features were scarcely to be recognized, his eyes, once so brilliant, were sunk and inanimate, his cheeks hollow, and his whole appearance was that of decay and desolation. He had perceived through one friendly chink in his cell that another morning had dawned, and from what he had learned from his jailer had cheered himself with the hope that this day would see an end to his miseries. Upon the first approaches of the king's servants, hearing more voices than usual at the door of his prison, he concluded that his hour was at length come, and he redoubled those mental prayers for resignation to the divine will, which were usual to the habit of his mind, and by which he was enabled to meet the stroke which hung over him with fortitude. At length the gates were thrown open with a crash, and at once a

crowd, brilliantly arrayed, accompanied by all the insignias of royalty, broke upon his astonished senses. His eyes were so dazzled by the combined glare of torches and daylight, that he was obliged to cover them for some time ere he could distinguish a single object; but before he had regained his sight, his fetters were knocked off, and he felt his person at liberty. Instead of the hoarse voice of the jailer, inviting him as he expected to attend his own execution, the first words spoken were in a kind tone by the Grand Vizir. They were as soothing to his senses as the promise of absolution to the desponding sinner, or as the calm of an opiate upon the nerves of a sleepless patient; they gradually prepared him to hear those good tidings which were about to bring renovation to his whole being, and to raise him from the grave to life—from utter despair to renewed hope.

It would be in vain to attempt to describe the gradations of feeling which took place in the mind of Zohrab, until he was put into complete possession of the change which had taken place in his fortunes. At first he could scarcely believe that he was to live, so fully had he prepared himself to die. But as he unravelled the consequences likely to ensue from the death of the Shah, and the accession of his successor, he began to place more value upon an existence to which he had become indifferent. When he was presented to Fattah Ali, when he heard the kindness of his expressions towards him, and when he reflected that it was no other than the brother of his Amima who thus addressed him, and who sought his friendship, his heart softened even to tears, and became alive to all the noblest emotions of his nature. Still, that great incentive to cling to life, the object of that love which had filled all the avenues to his heart, was wanting, and he heard with indifference from the king's lips, confirmed by the Vizir, of the honours, the dignities, and the worldly advantages that were in store for him. They both looked with the greatest interest upon the broken youth, as they observed the melancholy which seemed to pervade his whole being, and although they remarked that he strove to meet their kindness with corresponding alacrity and gratitude, still indifference to all that was said and promised preponderated. At

length the sympathies of Fattedh Ali struck upon the right chord, and soon it occurred to him, that he might afford his new friend the same relief that he himself had enjoyed, by producing a corresponding hope in his breast. Ordering every one to retire, when he was left with Zohrab, he said, "I am quite aware of what is passing in your mind; mine was equally affected, but hear my tale, and let the same hope which fills me, rejoice you also." Upon that, he related what he had looked upon as a dream, but which he now could resolve into certainty, explaining the reasons why he was sure that it could have been none but Sadek who uttered the words which struck his ear. Zohrab immediately caught at the information with the same avidity that a drowning man buffeted by a torrent catches at a passing plank. His whole nature at once was changed. His eyes resumed their wonted brilliancy, smiles broke out on his haggard face, and as tears suffused his eyes, he threw himself at the knees of his young sovereign, and embraced them with the most unbounded gratitude and tenderness. Then indeed was there that quick interchange of affection and sentiments between the two youths, which settled their future friendship, and as there was generated a similarity of hope in their hearts, so their sympathies went hand in hand, and nothing more was wanting to insure their happiness than the fulfilment of that assertion which had been so strangely pronounced on the eventful morning of the Shah's death.

Zohrab, in the course of a short time, was restored to health and to his usual good looks. It was not long ere he enjoyed the delight of embracing his mother, of being restored to the services of his faithful Ali, and of communicating to Mariam the hopes of once more seeing her mistress. The young king, during the short time which it required to make preparations for leaving Asterabad to proceed to his capital, in co-operation with the Vizir and Zohrab, had done every thing in his power to relieve the unfortunate inhabitants who had suffered by the late siege; and more particularly, had restored the house and fortunes of the fallen Zaul, giving back to his widow all his former possessions renovated and en-

riched, and making her every compensation as far as worldly matters were concerned, for her recent losses.

Very soon after, the king, followed by Zohrab and his court and army, took their departure for Tehran, accompanied to a certain distance by the whole population of the city, who did not cease putting up prayers for the prosperity of their new king.

CONCLUSION.

"Alham du lillah, tamam shūd"—praise be to Allah, it is done!

THE PERSIAN'S GRACE.

WE must now return to the desert, where Anima and her aged father had dragged on their existence in the tamest uniformity, no greater variety having taken place in the tenor of their life than might be produced by the change of seasons. Habit had rendered tolerable to him, that which she could not but esteem the most horrid of exiles. Although she devoted herself entirely to him, attending upon his infirmities with assiduous care, and doing her utmost endeavours to soften his miseries, still she felt that she did not possess sufficient fortitude to look forward to an interminable exile in the desert, to passing her best years in a state of almost savage nature, the more so as her heart was fixed upon the image of one who, if he knew of her present forlorn state, she was sure would undergo every danger and every sacrifice either to share it with her or to tear her from it; besides which, the possibility of being left entirely to herself in this desolate solitude, would haunt her imagination even to madness. She might be bereft of her father. To whom, then, could she turn for protection? Buried in oblivion as they seemed to be, they might be neglected and forgotten even by the man who had saved their lives, and then what would be her fate, left to the

mercies of rude and half savage rayats? Week after week, and month after month, dragged on, and nothing occurred which could make her suppose that her existence was known to any one. She saw none but her father, the young Ali Murad, and the old woman. She endeavoured to fortify herself with the consolations of religion, and in that her father was a great help and comfort. He could with pleasure give up life and its vanities, and even dreaded the idea of being restored to it; but this was not so easy for her, and excepting the one consolatory satisfaction of being of use and comfort to her father, she frequently regretted the compassion which her preserver had exercised in her favour, and wished that she had been added to the many victims of her uncle's vengeance.

It was her custom, at the close of day, to ascend the mound under which was situated their hut, and after having offered up her evening prayer, there to watch the gradual descent of the sun into the extended and unbroken horizon, her eyes passing over that long region of wilderness which she had crossed with such rapidity on the night of her arrival. She constantly turned her eyes and her thoughts in that direction, frequently indulging in the fond hope that perchance some kind being, hearing of her situation, might find his way to her, and make her recollect that she still belonged to the community of man; she often mistook some reed that thrust its head more prominently into the air than another, for a living being, and watched it with all the ardour of intense hope and expectation.

Often and often as her hopes had been disappointed, still she continued to gaze. It was at the close of an oppressive day, when the sultry south wind had blown with more than usual violence, accompanied by the most dispiriting howling, that Amima had taken post as usual on the hillock. The clouds threatened a stormy night, and long streaks of lightning were throwing uncertain gleams over the bleak wilderness, when her eyes of a sudden fixed themselves upon a small black spot on the very verge of the horizon. She had too long been deceived by the deceitful appearances of the reeds, to mistake this for one, and as she had studied their bearings

and distances, she was certain on this occasion she could not be mistaken, particularly as she remarked that it changed its position, sometimes disappearing altogether, at others re-appearing, whilst it increased in size at every moment. At first she imagined it to be an illusion, for frequently had she gazed and gazed until she could bring herself to believe she could see a whole army approaching; but still the object was there, a dark spot, changing place and increasing in size. At length she became quite certain that it was some live thing. Was it a wild beast—or a stray horse—or a lost camel? She conjectured that it might be any thing, save one of her own species. She did not venture to hope so much happiness. But still it approached, and there seemed intelligence in its action. It appeared to be making for the mound. At length, all doubt having vanished, the blood forsook her face, and trickled in cold channels through her veins, when her astonished and delighted eyes beheld distinctly a cavalier urging on his steed in a straight line to where she sat. Her step faltered as she rose to retreat, and her eyes were suffused by sudden dimness, until they were relieved by tears. As soon as she could walk, she hurried onwards to her home, and with great eagerness called to her father. "In the name of Allah," she said, "come, father, come!—a horseman speeds towards us from the west."

"How!" said the old man, with intense agitation; is there one who knows how to find the broken Hussein?"

They had scarcely said these words, when the unusual sounds of horse's hoofs confirmed Anima's words, and were heard trampling towards the door of the hut. The youth, Ali Murad, rushed out to see who it might be, and soon the stern and hollow voice of a stranger was heard.

"Where is the khan?—Where is the lady banou?" said the voice.

The boy led the stranger in. He was a tall figure, his dress greatly weatherworn and dusted, and he was armed at all points. The last gleams of day scarcely glanced into the dark room, and there was difficulty in *distinguishing* his features. The stranger's first impulse

was to rush towards the old khan, to seize his hand, kiss his knee, and then bow himself before Amima, exclaiming at the same time, "*Salam alekum*, peace be unto you!"

"That is Sadek's voice," said the blind prince, "as I live, that is the voice of an old servant."

"Allah preserve us," exclaimed Amima, as she looked upon him, "it is indeed Sadek! Welcome to you—welcome, Sadek Beg—long have we expected you—what news? Sit."

Her agitation strongly manifested itself as she spoke, tears trembling in her eyes, and the nervousness of tears giving agitation to her voice.

The feeling was communicated to the rough man before her, and he could scarcely speak, from the variety of sensations which at once pervaded his breast. Assassin of his king, he became the saviour of the beings before him. He was voluntarily throwing himself into exile, when at the same time he restored them to the world, its delights, and its honours.

"The news I bring," said he, "is this: the Shah is dead—Fatteh Ali reigns—and Zohrab lives. I come to conduct thee to Tehran."

It would be impossible to describe the varied feelings which overwhelmed at once both father and daughter, upon hearing these words. She threw herself into his arms and sobbed aloud, whilst he pressed her to his heart, and in solemn and reverential tones invoked the awful name of his Creator, the author and disposer of all things. Long did it take to restore their minds to the control of reason. The old man, although he rejoiced for the safety of his daughter and son, shrunk from the new habits which he was called upon to adopt, whilst the lovely Amima blushed through all her frame, as her thoughts dwelt almost exclusively upon that one absorbing object of her heart, her lover, and rapidly ran over all the happiness in store for her. They scarcely inquired how such strange events had come to pass, so totally were they engrossed with the results; and allowed some time to elapse ere they called upon Sadek to relate the different events that had occurred since he had last visited the desert. We must leave them for a while to exhaust their curiosity

and make the preparations for their journey, in order to describe the entrance of the young king into his capital.

Long indeed was it since Tehran had seen so happy a day, or Persia been cheered by such happy prospects, as when Fattéh Ali Shah entered its gates. The arrangements made for his reception, were on the most magnificent scale. The whole country seemed with one consent to have put on a new dress, and as the court poet expressed it, "Nature had thrown off the sackcloth and ashes of oppression, to put on the kalaat of happiness." Every where men were seen congratulating each other, bandying their *mubarek buds* from family to family. Every head that could turn a stanza was busy in making the "nightingale of the pen flutter about the new blown rose of royalty." Astrologers were taken up in drawing the horoscope of the new king, predicting his greatness, and establishing his perfections. The priests composed new blessings for his special purpose and new curses for his enemies—and from that day every one began to form some project for future years, in the hopes of being able to put it into practice,—a satisfaction unknown during the reign of the late king, for it was looked upon as presumption and imprudence to lay a plan even for the next day.

Upon the morning of the young king's entrance into the city, the whole male population in new clothes turned out to meet him, many of the most zealous proceeding several parasangs on the road, to catch the first glimpse of his person, whilst the women in their white veils lined the walls. At intervals oxen were sacrificed on his road, and according to ancient custom their heads were thrown under his horse's feet. Sugar, that emblem of prosperity in a Persian's estimation, was spread on the road in profusion; a numerous band of wrestlers, wielders of clubs, of *lutis* or merry-andrews, and bear and monkey leaders, were in readiness to leap, dance, sing, and beat their drums in his honour; the longest *pai endax* that had ever been spread, composed of the richest and most costly stuffs, reaching from the threshold of the city gate to the foot of the throne, was prepared for his horse to walk over; the most noisy *nokara* that had ever shaken the

walls and stunned the people of Tehran, was seated in high places, ready to strike up the instant he appeared, and at night the blaze of illuminations was such as to put the heavens to the blush, and make the moon and stars hide their diminished heads.

When at length he did appear surrounded by his brilliant cortege, the shouts that rent the air, as the same poet said, "were reverberated in long and deep echoes at the bottom of every Persian heart, and passing from earth to Jehanum, were again repeated for a hundred years about the soul of the dead tyrant, forming as great a part of his punishment there, as they afforded pleasure to Persia.

Every one was struck with the beauty of the young Shah, of his grace, his inimitable attractive manner, and the felicity of his expressions, as he presented the emblematic sugar to each congratulating noble. All were happy to behold their favourite grand Vizir among them again. "But who," said they, "is the youth who rides on the right of the king? Who ever before saw so noble a countenance, so Rustam a form, and such charm of appearance? As soon as they knew him to be Zohrab, the great and celebrated Zohrab, all others were neglected to gaze upon him, and never had Tehrani seen a sight in every way so agreeable—a young and beloved king, a wise Vizir to direct his councils, and an invincible warrior to guard his throne.

The cavalcade proceeded with great dignity, amidst the joyful cries and happy faces of the multitude. The king crossed the threshold of the city at the proper hour prescribed by the astrologer in chief, and seated himself upon the throne, amidst the roar of cannon, the din of the *nokara*, and the prayers of the assembled *ullemah*.

The next day was appointed for the formal investiture of the sword of state by the *mushtehed*, who had come expressly from Kom, his usual seat for that purpose, as well as to bind on the armlets of royalty, and to present the crown.

The day came with all its solemnities. The great court, situated before the open hall, supported by columns, in which was placed the marble throne, was early crowded by the principal officers of state in their most

brilliant brocades, arms, and jewels; every avenue to the palace was lined by troops; the *zamburek* camels, with their gaudiest trappings, were placed in long rows in the maidan; the elephants were astonishing the crowd, their rich *howdars* glittering with mirrors and trappings of cloth of gold. The whole city was gathered in and about the palace at noon; when the young king appeared staggering under the splendour of his dress, covered with jewels of such astonishing value that every other sovereign might blush for poverty. The *mushtehed*, an old man of dervish-like appearance, his white beard sweeping his breast, was brought forward, together with a brilliant sword, which he buckled on the side of the king, uttering a prayer for its success. The armlets, the celebrated *koh noor* and *deriah noor*, were then fastened on his arms, and the crown placed upon his head; and then, when fairly seated on his throne, the *Fatteh* was pronounced and the ceremony concluded by the din of artillery and the shouts of the multitude, which told the city and Persia that they now possessed a king installed with every due formality.

During the ceremony, Zohrab, in the dress of a soldier, stood on one side of the throne, and the Grand Vizir on the other. The shouts of joy were still ringing through the air, when a sensation of stir and curiosity was felt throughout the assembled courtiers, by the appearance of an old blind man, leaning on a staff, slowly making his way through the crowd, conducted by a youth of lowly appearance, and followed by a female, who, though closely veiled, exhibited the most beautiful and attractive form. This little group was allowed to proceed, headed by an officer of the household, who with a voice of authority ordered a passage to be cleared. It gradually made its way to the throne. The sensation it produced became stronger and stronger at every moment. Some of the old soldiers and attendants recognised the once famous Hussein Kûli Khan in the stranger, and ran to kiss the skirt of his garment. The cry of "Hussein Kûli Khan,—the king's father,—Aga Mahomed's brother!" rose little by little, and at length struck the ear of the Grand Vizir. The young king soon caught the sounds; Zohrab's eye fell at once upon a

form too strongly imprinted upon his memory ever to be forgotten; and almost with one consent they jointly hastened towards them. "My father, my father!" cried Fattah Ali, and his brilliant and graceful figure was seen to rush forward, and fall upon the old man's neck, with all the ecstasy of filial love.

It would be in vain to describe what followed; for having now brought our hero and heroine together in this auspicious manner, who shall again venture to separate them? Never was happiness equal to theirs! The feelings of joy which overwhelmed Amima, when at the same moment she embraced her brother, saw her lover, and was protected by her father, are such as few heroines enjoy. Moreover, as soon as she returned to her rooms in the harem, she was greeted not only by her faithful Mariam, but by all the birds of her groves, which had so long been deprived of her presence.

The nuptials of Zohrab and Amima were soon after celebrated in a style of magnificence that had long been unknown in Persia; and we need not say that never was a couple so blessed or so happy.

We grieve, however, to throw a cloud over this picture of unmixed joy, by exhibiting the looks of woe, of disappointed ambition, and of concentrated rage, which appeared upon the countenance of the forgotten Zulma. She long had been smarting under the prospects of prosperity which cheered the rest of her countrymen. She foresaw that her reign was over; and such was now the universal joy and consequent absence of punishment, that she felt that neither her's nor her father's office would enjoy the same consideration which it did in the preceding reign, and that their employment was gone. She frequently turned her mind from one scheme of ambition to another; at length, finding that her every other project failed, she determined on marrying Shir Khan, and there, it is said, she succeeded to her heart's content; for although he daily assured her that no man in the world was like him, and that he had a peculiar way of being different to every one else known only to himself, she did not cease as regularly to administer a daily dose of her slipper on his mouth, accompanied with variations by pulls at his curls and clutches on his beard.

Sadek having deposited his precious charges at the gate of Tehran, quitted Persia for ever, passed the rest of his life in his native village in Georgia, secretly cherished and befriended by the new king; whilst Hussein returned to a post about the person. A general pardon was pronounced to all who had been called offenders, or who for crimes real or imaginary had been confined by the late king, and the new rule began by a series of peaceful and quiet years, which have been perpetuated by a longer reign than Persia has almost ever known.

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